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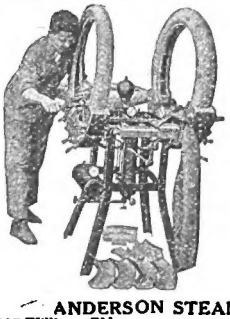

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FIRST AUGUST
1921
VOL. XXX No 3

Published Twice a Month by The Ridgway Company

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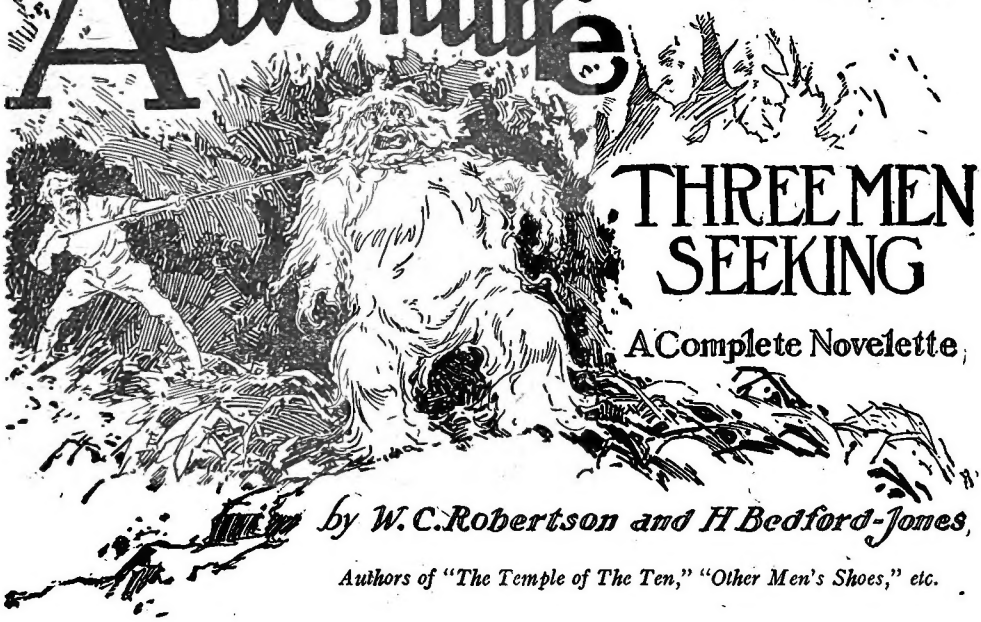
VOL. XXX NO. 3



THREE MEN SEEKING

A Complete Novelette

by W. C. Robertson and H Bedford-Jones,

Authors of "The Temple of The Ten," "Other Men's Shoes," etc.

CHAPTER I

IT-THAT-WALKS-UP

BLAKE FOURNIER scanned the sullen half-breed who faced him and, behind Rudolfo, the swarthy, frightened faces of the five remaining men.

"Coward!" said Fournier coldly. "What are you afraid of?"

"It-that-walks-up," responded Rudolfo.

The half-breed jerked his head toward the silent jungle behind the camp.

"And they are close. I have talked with them tonight. Was not my mother of their blood? They told me that we could go back from here. Otherwise, we die, each man of us."

Fournier lifted his stark blue eyes and gazed at the night-black jungle wall. He could descry nothing, could hear no token of man's presence. Yet he knew that Rudolfo did not lie. There, hemming in the little camp like silent wolves, were the Xicaque Indians, those who inhabited the Twin Mountain.

"Oh, *señor!*" burst forth one of the men behind Rudolfo. "We are cowards, that is true. No man has ever gone to the Twin Mountain and returned alive. No man can cross this river ahead of us, except he swim, and to swim in that water is death. Behind us are the wild men with arrows, ahead of us is It-that-walks-up, and—and we are afraid, *señor*."

Fournier's gaze swept them coldly in the firelight. Argument, he knew, was useless. These men of Honduras were not cowards, but they feared the unknown. Rudolfo had strong Xicaque blood and had been communicating with the Indians. If pressed too urgently, they would simply desert and go, leaving the three white men to die.

"*Señores*," he said, "if I prove that this man lies, that we can cross this river without swimming, will you go on with us?"

"No, *señor*," answered Rudolfo firmly.

He stooped and drew with his finger in the cold outer ashes of the fire.

"Look you, *señor*, what lies ahead! This circle is the Twin Mountain which lies above us. Now, see—this half of it is one peak, the peak of San Pedro, on which live the Xicaque people.

"This other half is the peak of San Pablo, and between those two peaks no man may pass, nor can any man reach San Pablo from below, because of the

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cliffs. It is upon San Pablo that lives It-that-walks-up. To reach San Pablo, one would first have to climb San Pedro, and the *señor* knows that no man living has been allowed to do this. The men of the Xicaque are very jealous."

"What do you know of all this?" queried Fournier amusedly. "Have you been there?"

"No, because I have white blood, *señor*."

Fournier dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand.

"Very well. Will you help us to cross the river in the morning, if we then release you from your engagement?"

Rudolfo looked at the other men, twisting his head over his shoulder to see them. Despite their words, they were not cowards. They nodded hesitantly.

"It means death to you three *señores*," said Rudolfo, his voice sullen.

"Is not death able to reach us in Trujillo, or in Tegucigalpa, as well as on the Twin Mountain?" retorted Fournier. "Do you agree?"

Rudolfo nodded.

"We agree, *señor*. Yet no man can cross that river except by swimming."

Fournier rose without answer and strode back to join his companions.

HE FOUND them as he had left them, sitting by the door of the little tent. MacDonald was bending shaggy brows over solitaire, silently dealing, shuffling, placing the cards. He glanced up at Fournier, grimaced and continued his game.

"The Professor," as Jenks had become known in Honduras, was a slender man with a thin, outstanding nose, extremely deep-set eyes of golden brown and a straggly golden beard that outlined his face. Theodore Jenks was that rarest of men—one who can simply ignore all the petty discomforts and tribulations of jungle work, and laugh at the great ones.

Jenks had picked up those ancient partners, Fournier and MacDonald, at the coast and had engaged them to take him wherever he wanted to go into Honduras. Presently, among the three of them, all other bond than comradeship was forgotten. The two partners had first laughed at the scientist, had then come to respect him and at length ended by loving him. It is true that they still laughed at the object of his search, however.

Fournier sat down and pulled out his pipe. The professor closed the note-book in which he had been scribbling and fumbled for his tobacco pouch. MacDonald went on dealing.

"Well," said Jenks, passing his pouch to Fournier and then filling his own pipe, "it was an ultimatum?"

"Get out or get left," responded Fournier curtly. "They promised to help us across the river in the morning before they vamose."

MacDonald grunted scornfully.

"Across? Aiblins, ye mean through! And there's wee fish in yon water, like's in the Amazon. Flesh-eaters."

"No, no, my friends," said the Professor, and shook his head. "I'll not have one of you swimming the river. Won't do. Go myself first. We'll go back."

Fournier smiled.

"I said across," he drawled. "I mean across. What's more, Rudolfo mentioned It-that-walks-up. I suppose he means erect. Anyhow, he mentioned it."

The very deep eyes of Jenks lifted and widened.

"Oh!" he said in a quick breath. "Oh! The *zecpie!* And the liars swore they had never heard of it!"

"Sure," returned Fournier. "Lives on San Pablo—the north peak. The Xicaques live on San Pedro, the south peak. Impassable chasm between, I fancy. Don't know yet."

Jenks gazed out at the blackness and the twinkling stars. In the silence, the roaring rush of the river came to them strongly, drowning all lesser sounds.

"I won't have it," said Jenks at length. "We're hemmed in on this point of land. To go ahead, we have to cross the river—an impossibility, unless some one swims with a line. Then the three of us, alone. Leave the equipment, face the Xicaques with three rifles—no! For myself, no matter. But I shan't drag you into idiotic rashness, my friends."

"We're not bairns," grunted MacDonald. "Flake says he can cross the water; so that's settled. I'll make siccer o' the Injuns."

"Eh?" Fournier looked sharply at his partner. "You will? How so?"

"How so, my mannie?" mocked MacDonald. "Wait an' see. Ha' faith!"

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Jenks looked from one to the other of these remarkable men. Pride in their fellowship darkened his flaming eyes.

"Flake answers for the river," he said musingly. "Mac answers for the Indians. Thus two impossibilities become surmountable. Well, I will answer for the chasm, if there is one!"

"Eh?" MacDonald looked at him suddenly. "Will your science do that?"

Jenks chuckled. "No. My common sense will."

"Then we go on?"

"If you vote yes."

MacDonald shrugged his huge shoulders and turned his attention to the cards.

"Wish I knew!" said Fournier, poking at his pipe with his finger. "I've heard this *zeepie* legend, of course; thing that walks like a man, has fur like a beast and sings like a-devil. God of the Xicaques, takes their offerings and an occasional girl, kills the victims, man or beast, left for him. A good, honest, thoroughly Indian Aztec god. But does he exist?

"If I thought so," he pursued, "I'd bust the gates of —— to get you to him, professor. You know the tales about the mountain yonder; a living spring of blood, and so forth. These devils are peaceful folk, but no white man has ever set foot on that mountain and the Government respects their privacy."

MacDonald uttered a laugh.

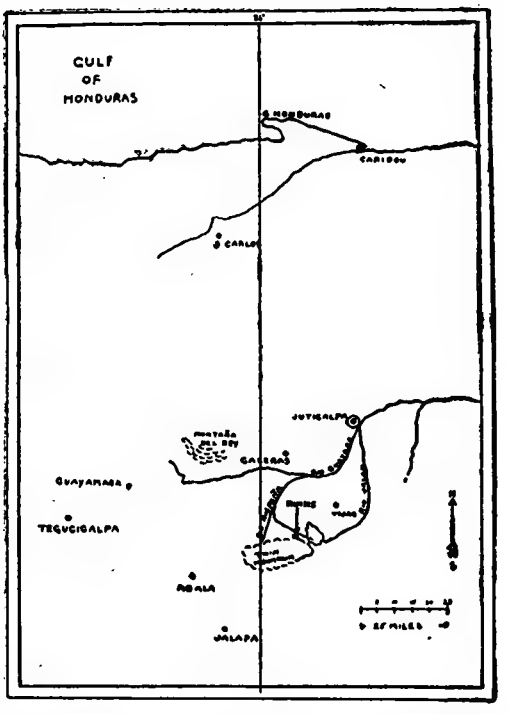
"The Government knows what's best for it, aye!"

The three men sat in silence, with that continual roar of the river in their ears.

Their position, in all truth, was unpleasant. They were camped at a little knuckle of land, a point of earth, about which swept the Hispania river in a rushing bend. A river a hundred feet in width, but of torrential force; a river in which the tiny blood-eating fishes abounded in swarms.

And what was their errand? A mad one, it seemed. Jenks wanted to investigate the legends of the *zeepie*, a fabulous creature rumored to inhabit the Twin Mountain, the deity of the Xicaque Indians. Now, these folk were peaceful, but kept all intruders from their mountain lands. There were weird tales of that mountain—springs of warm blood, human sacrifices, *diablerie* without end; all of them merest rumor.

"It is true that there are wild black



cattle on the mountain," pursued Fournier reflectively, "for I once saw a hide that had been traded by an Xicaque. We'll take you there, professor, just to prove that the *zeepie* doesn't exist. If we thought it did exist, we'd lay things wide open, as I say, to get there. Eh, Mac?"

MacDonald grunted assent.

"How far is the mountain from here, you think?" asked Jenks.

"Ten miles, perhaps," said Fournier. "Might have reached her before this. I think Rudolfo guided us to this spot so we'd give up. He's a crafty rogue."

"Listen!"

With the word Jenks leaped upright, then stiffened.

The word was not needed. MacDonald had dropped his cards and reached for his rifle. Fournier kicked at the fire with his boots, then flung himself flat as the brands scattered. Yet nothing happened.

The three men lay silent, trying to catch again that frightful sound which had reached through the roar of the river. From Rudolfo and the other men came stifled cries of sheer panic. These cries were echoed from the jungle, faintly but horribly, as if that awful sound of fear had startled the lurking Indians there.

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Suddenly it came again. Fournier felt the hair lift on his head, felt the cold clamminess of sweat down his spine. The sound was nothing but a cry; a faint, far-flung cry, yet absolutely unknown to these men, who knew all the jungle creatures.

"Sings in B flat," murmured the professor.

A true word; the creature sang rather than cried. "*Sipi-sipi-sipi-sipi-sipi!*" it rang, continually increasing; a frightful and inhuman cry, holding a strange thrill which beat into the brain. Suddenly, as if by some vibratory spasm, the cry jumped to a clear harmonic. It returned immediately to the old note, continued to another break—and ended.

The three white men gazed at each other in the obscurity of the dying fire. Each one, perhaps, was somewhat ashamed of the panic into which he had fallen. Before any could speak, one of their men uttered a terrible yell and went headlong into the jungle, running, screaming incoherently.

"Mad," said MacDonald, wiping his brow. "And enough to drive any one mad!"

"What is it?" queried Jenks in a low voice.

"My Lord, what a question to ask!" said Fournier a trifle hoarsely. "That's your cursed *zeepie*, if you want to know!"

"Oh!" said the professor. "In that case, I suggest that we—er—that we get a bit of sleep."

"Sleep!" grunted MacDonald. "Sleep! After that? Losh!"

CHAPTER II

IT-THAT-WALKS-ACROSS

UPON the following morning MacDonald wakened the professor with a playful dig.

"My mannie, ye dinna spell it richt!" he boomed.

"Spell what right?" inquired Jenks, rubbing his eyes.

"The beastie yonder."

Fournier joined them, chuckling.

"Sure enough, professor! We took a look at your note-books last night, Mac and I. Now, you've put it down as *zeepie*, whereas the local spelling is *zipi*——"

"What I've put, I've put," declared Jenks. "If we find the creature, the name is to be *Zeepie Fourniensis*. Named after you, confound your impudence! Those fellows gone yet?"

They had not gone yet. Rudolfo and his comrades, albeit badly shaken by that cry in the night, were waiting to bid their employers hail and farewell.

As the three white men sat at breakfast outside their tent, they faced what some men would have called a frightful trail. At its end, scarce ten miles distant yet seeming much closer, towered the Twin Mountain. This was no more than a huge, forested chunk of lava, or rather volcanic ash, which retained the rains beneath its surface and thus rendered its vegetation magnificent. The peak appeared to be a great mesa, from their view of it, and was apparently undivided.

This side the mountain was rolling jungle. Directly fronting them was the river, a rushing mass of water compressed within a deep and narrow channel, which bent in a white arc about the promontory on which lay the camp.

"What I'm waiting to find out," declared Jenks as they discussed breakfast, "is how the river is to be crossed!"

"That," and Fournier chuckled, "is exactly what Rudolfo and the natives are also waiting to find out! Get your packs ready—mine's made up. Better make a fifty-pound limit. Join me when you're ready, and we'll go."

He sauntered off to the shore, where Rudolfo and the other men were rolling a huge log down to the water's edge. His cold eyes sparkled on the sullen gaze of the half-breed.

"Well, Rudolfo? Have you talked with your Xicaque friends this morning?"

If Rudolfo were minded to lie, those crystal-clear eyes changed his intent.

"*Si, señor*," he responded with a glance at the jungle wall. "And I have spoken good words for you, telling them that you were not like other white men, after gold and silver, but that you sought only It-that-walks-up."

"Thanks. And what did they say?"

"That they would send word ahead to the chiefs before killing you, and that if you were mad enough to go on such an errand, it was likely you would be allowed to go. It-that-walks-up will certainly kill you, and they are minded to let you go as victims. Besides, if you are able to cross the river

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as you say, *señor*, how could these men follow?"

Fournier chuckled.

"By the same means, once they've seen it work. You have made the ropes as I ordered, and tested them?"

Rudolfo pointed to coils of light line at either end of the log, augmented by lines twined from stout lianas. Fournier inspected them carefully and found them good.

MacDonald appeared with a pack quickly made up and joined Fournier. To the latter he pointed out something, by means of grunts and certain disjointed words. Fournier understood that it was a question of a trail on the other side the river. A trail had brought them here, ending abruptly at the water. When Mac pointed to a tree overhead Fournier examined it closely and nodded.

"Right, Mac. The Xicaques allow men such as Rudolfo to come this far, using the river as barrier. The chafing on the tree shows that a heavy line has been there for years. Either they've had a bridge, or else——"

"Packin' goods, my mannie," yawned the big Scot. "Aye! A line ower the water, for to haul packs. Tradin' goods. Humph!"

"Then we'll find a trail on the other side. By the way, Mac! Rudolfo says that we'll probably go on unmolested. No use killing us, if we're going to interview the *zeepie*. He'll do it. So you'll not have to negotiate."

MacDonald grinned.

"I had a' that figured out in ma head, laddie. Where's your brig?"

Fournier turned, as Professor Jenks joined them, and without more speech went to the floating log. He paused for a final word with Rudolfo, who nodded and called his men. All caught up the coils of line and followed him.

"Follow your leader," exclaimed Fournier, and was off.

Jenks and MacDonald watched, in their eyes the astonished comprehension with which men greet the simple solution of some apparently knotty problem.

The solution was simple, indeed, but highly ingenious. A long rope had been fastened to a tree at the edge of the river, almost on the outer point of the promontory. This rope was carried down-river a hundred feet. There it was made fast to the center of a short line, both ends of which were tied about the points of the log, in such a manner that they could be lengthened or shortened as desired.

"Fournier stepped aboard, pack on shoulders. The log had been chosen by one who knew, with a strong belly midway, which served as keel and prevented undue rolling. Fournier made his way to the front end, where he sat down and hauled in on the front rope, fastening this. Thus, the log was at an angle to the current, point up-stream.

The log was turned loose. Instantly, the swift current, acting on the inclined plane of the log, which was retained by the bridle, sent the log bobbing out across the water. To Rudolfo and his men this savored highly of magic; to the unseen Xicaques watching from the jungle wall it must have smelt of brimstone. The log went across the river without a pause or a hitch.

Fournier stepped ashore on the other side, loosed the bridle, and then bridled the other end of the log in like fashion and shoved her out. She came back almost to the point of starting.

"She'll hold both of us, Mac," announced the professor. "What say?"

"Aye," grunted MacDonald. "But mind your balance, my mannie!"

The balance was minded. With both men aboard the log was low in the water, but the shore-lines had been spiked to either end of the log and aided in holding her from rolling. With surprizing speed she wallowed through the swift waters and sought the other bank. Fournier greeted his comrades with a triumphant grin.

"Losh, he's a wonderfu' man!" said Mac, proudly. "Professor, would ye mind the brain in that head? Most amazin'—who'd suspect it?"

Fournier quietly fastened the log with one of the bridle ropes.

"The Indians won't touch this—bad medicine. We'll likely need her on the way out. All ready?"

"All ready," said Jenks. "Hah! Think you're smart with that confounded trick, do you? Wait until we reach that chasm, and I'll make you sit up!"

The three men grinned, nodded at each other and set out to locate the supposed trail. Within ten minutes Mac found it, and the three struck off in single file.

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Almost instantly the river behind was lost to them, the mountain towering ahead was gone; there was nothing but jungle, patched with blue sky far above. The equipment borne by each of the three men was almost identical. A Collins machete and a pistol at belt; a blanket, enclosed in *carpa de hule*, was wrapped about head-netting, socks and food. This latter consisted chiefly of *totoposties**, the Honduran hardtack, made of ground corn with salt and fat drippings and baked to the texture of a brick. Jenks and Fournier each bore a light .250-3000 Savage, but MacDonald clung to his old "Hammer of Thor" Winchester. Cakes of home-made chocolate, a few cooking-utensils and sandfly lotion completed the loads.

Somewhat to the surprize of Fournier the path which they followed proved to be that of a small creek which emptied into the larger stream, and which seemed to come direct from the Twin Mountains.

This was literally a sunless river, practically enclosed by the jungle vegetation. Along the trail was perpetual twilight, while overhead, climbing the trees to higher levels, wound great masses of a flowering *bejuca*, its heavy flower-fragrance deadening the air.

The trail was fair for some distance but brought them to a rocky gorge filled with *valseras*—piles of brush and trees piled in hopeless intrication by the floods. With a grunt of "*Muy trabajosa!*" Mac unlimbered his machete and the others followed suit. For an hour the three hewed their way through the massed vines at the water's edge, then struck the path of a *danto* or tapir—a tunnel which brought them again to a fair trail beyond the gorge.

THEY emerged abruptly from the twilight and found themselves at the crest of a small hill, used by the Indians, undoubtedly, as a post of observation. All three stood silent, panting from the climb, astonished by the sight which greeted them.

Ahead towered the Twin Mountain. In between was rising ground. *Encino*, *laqueliso* and other tropic wood-growth reached out from the dark green mass of the jungle and ran into small pines and black-jack oak; these, farther on, merged into the huge moss-hung pines, giants of the high lands. Behind them was the jungle, splashed and ribboned with the bright colors of the *bejucas*, massed across the entire valley, split from time to time by the bright silver of the rushing river.

Nor, as the three stood here, as it were, between the devil of the Twin Mountain and the deep sea of the jungle, were they alone. The jungle fluttered with the weird cries of brilliant birds, punctuated by the booming call of companies of olingoes, or large monkeys. Swinging through the upper jungle, chattering fearlessly at the three white men, peered forth the smaller shapes of the white-faced monkeys. The shrill, whistling note of a *danto's* warning cry echoed from close at hand. Wild hogs grunted in a demoniac undernote.

Fournier's eye kindled as he surveyed the scene. This was his country; he loved it. More, something lay beyond of which he knew nothing—the Twin Mountain. Legends haunted that place, rumors of ancient cities and unearthly demons. Far up the valley, far toward the north flank of that mountain, a huge billow of mist choked off the jungle view—a boiling pot of intensely white cloud, shot with gold from the sun's rays, glittering now and again with rainbow hues, that seethed and heaved up and across endlessly.

"*Berberillos*," grunted Mac, jerking a thumb toward some nearer trees. "That means wild turkey, maybe. I'm sayin' maybe, d'ye ken; I'm not sayin' it's so."

Jenks, like Fournier, said nothing, but stared out at the long elevation of the Twin Mountain. Suddenly MacDonald started to speak, but his words died away, as he whirled. All three men stared at the Twin Mountain.

A noise came to them—a thin, sibilant noise that seemed to lift up out of the very ground beneath their feet. It was a vibrant *clang-g-g*, between the ring of steel and the tongue of a bell, but carrying a vibratory humming of great permanence, that lingered with them a full minute. It came again, and yet again—a most extraordinary sound.

"A bird?" queried Jenks.

Fournier shook his head.

"Where from, Mac? The mountain?"

"Aye. An Injun bell—maybe. I'm not sayin' it's so, ye ken."

Fournier lifted his brows as if tempted to dissent. He lifted his pack.

*Sic—W. C. R. Sounds like Battle Creek, but it is not.

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"All right, boys. Let's be going on. Open country now, thank Heaven—but watch out for *garrapatas!* Make the professor a brush, Mac."

They set forth again on the last stage of the journey.

CHAPTER III

THE SPRING OF BLOOD

OF THE several varieties of ticks which inhabit Honduras, the smallest and hottest is the *garrapata.* These creatures, the size of fly-specks, hang on leaves and grass and transfer to the first moving object that comes along. They transfer in thousands and no white man can endure the transfer for long.

The three who followed the trail switched their legs continually with bunchy switches but even so, the labor availed them little. Fournier, at the first premonitory burnings, called a halt.

"Past noon," he said. "Time to eat. We're going to reach that mountain in another hour, so take it easy. Get out the gas bottles and liquor up!"

There was no protest. A pest-free spot was selected and the three men halted for the noon meal. The kerosene vials were opened and amid much tribulation the new colonies of *garrapatas* were consigned to outer darkness.

A meal, a smoke and the end of the trail in sight. All three men were silent, not knowing what lay ahead. Jenks was curiously eager, restrained, excited. Mac was phlegmatic as ever. Fournier, planning on meat for dinner, seized the chance to shoot a wild hog; the echoes of that shot were followed by a dozen more of the piercing *clang* strokes, which now undoubtedly came from the mountain ahead. What sort of bell made that noise, if bell it were, none could say.

Fournier's guess of an hour was wrong. It was four in the afternoon when an unarmed man appeared in the faint trail ahead of them. Rocky ground here, rising sharply, the trail winding up a *cañoncito* that led straight up the mountain.

At sight of the unarmed Indian who advanced toward them Fournier laid down his rifle and stepped forward alone. He knew that this man, despite his ragged clothes, must be a chief. Messages had been received from the band at the Hispania River.

That his guess was correct, Fournier learned when he drew close to the Indian. The man's features were instinct with authority; outside his ragged shirt hung a necklet of raw gold, evidently some symbol of position or rank. He lifted an empty palm toward Fournier, who returned the gesture—and spoke.

"The *señores* know that the people of the Xicaque do not like visitors?"

The grave eyes of the Indian probed the coldly sparkling orbs of the white man, plumbing them, sifting what lay beyond them, searching for character. Divining this, Fournier assented.

"We understand, *señor,*" he said. "We have no concern with the people of the Xicaque. We do not seek gold. We do not seek to ascend San Pedro. What we wish is to reach San Pablo. Tell us how to do that, without climbing your mountain, and we will do it."

Now, this was a clever speech, putting much in little. The Xicaques have kept their pueblo of Pijul clear of white men, not from any hostility, but for better reasons. When they wish to trade, they go to the white men; at other times, they are isolated. Even when trading, they fumigate all goods, even all money, with smoke of aromatic leaves.

In effect, their isolation comes from fear, not of man, but of disease. Above all else they dread *catarro,* or influenza.

"I hear and I believe, *señor,*" said the Indian, who kept his distance while he spoke. "There is no way of reaching San Pablo without ascending San Pedro. Even then you can not reach the north peak. Between it and us lies a great gulf."

"We three men," answered Fournier, "crossed the Hispania this morning. We can cross that gulf. We wish to reach the *zeepie.*"

"I am sorry for you, *señores.* No man can cross the gulf, but It-that-walks-up can cross. It-that-walks-up will surely kill you, if you ascend San Pedro. We will not let you in our pueblo, and unless you are behind the walls, It-that-walks-up will kill you."

Fournier reflected that the *zeepie* could cross the chasm evidently.

"What lies on the north peak, then?" he asked.

"*Quien sabe?*" The Indian shook his

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head. "No man has been there for generations. None lives there, except the women whom It-that-walks-up has taken. We have heard that you wish to see It-that-walks-up. I have come to warn you, *señores.* We do not hate white men. We will not fight against you. But you can not enter our pueblo."

Fournier nodded comprehension. There was a short silence. The Indian was manshy, anxious to be gone; a false word might throw him into suspicious hostility. The salient point in this interview, was that he was not only willing but eager to offer the three white men as a sacrifice to the *zeepie*, provided he could do it in his own way. This suited Fournier well enough.

"*Bueno!*" he responded. "You are the governor of the pueblo? We trust you, *amigo.* You may trust us. You will guide us to the gulf between the peaks, that we may cross?"

"You need not cross," was the grim answer. "It-that-walks-up will take you. Will you not go back?"

Fournier merely smiled. It was response enough. The Indian nodded gravely and continued.

"Then, *señor*, in an hour you will reach the spring of blood. Camp there for tonight; good water is nearby. At daylight I will send one to guide you. You must give him a paper which will absolve me before the Government of all blame for your deaths. Two hours after sunrise you will stand at the gulf."

"Good," said Fournier, and turned.

The Indian disappeared.

Rejoining his companions, he found them coolly employing their gas bottles against the *garrapatas*, and joined them at this occupation. He briefly recounted the dialog and MacDonald chuckled.

"Aye, oh, aye! *I* thought as much, maybe. Ye needna speet at me, my mannie! There's no ficht in these laddie bucks, unless ye flick 'em on the raw."

Jenks laughed and filled his pipe.

"So you figured on this procedure, did you, when you agreed to make sure of the Indians?"

"You bet he did!" put in Fournier. "Mac has these redskins down pat. I thought it a bit queer that he was so sure of himself—but he was sure of them, not of himself!"

"Have it your own way," grunted Mac, a twinkle in his eye. "And now I'll be makin' a prophecy; wull ye hear it or no?"

"Fire away," returned the professor. Fournier's brows went up; his eyes glittered on MacDonald, an uneasy wonderment in his gaze. "So you're a prophet, are you?"

"Aye, mannie," was the complacent response. "Ma guid spirit whispers to me that when we find the *zeepie*, shoot first an' shoot quick!"

"Nonsense, Mac!" Jenks frowned. "Three of us can take the creature alive, surely! If the beast really exists, as I firmly believe, we must take him alive."

Mac, offended, gave the professor and Fournier a singular look, emitted a grunt and picked up his pack. As he strode off Fournier touched the arm of Jenks.

"Careful, professor! Old Mac knows more than he says. We'll get your creature alive if possible—but be careful! There's a joker hidden away somewhere and Mac has a hunch what it is."

"Have you?" demanded Jenks bluntly.

Fournier shook his head, a worried look in his eye.

"No, confound it!" Packs up, the two men were following the long-striding MacDonald. "Not a ghost of a notion, professor. Something queer about that chasm no man can pass, but which It-that-walks-up can cross at will. Something queer about these Xicaques lettin' us go, as though they hoped we and the *zeepie* would all cut each other's throats! I don't sabe it."

Jenks puffed out a cloud of smoke, his deep-set eyes flaming.

"Right, Flake! These Indians are no fools. Perhaps they hope we'll destroy the beast."

"Like enough. I gather he's anything but a benevolent despot; kills their men, takes their women, keeps them behind walls at night. Hm! These redskins have thinned down pretty well, and they don't fancy extermination. If we kill the brute, and they kill us on the way out—it'd be a very pretty job, what?"

"Neat, extremely neat," commented the professor placidly. "More brains than I gave them credit for, Flake! Can't we descend the north flank of the mountain and come out that way, instead of hitting back over this trail?"

Fournier shrugged.

"*Quien sabe?* So far as we know, it would take weeks of cutting through unbroken

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jungle. But we don't know it all, by a large sight! Let's wait and see. If you don't hurry Providence, you soon find out what a cursed little, puny, feeble thing your own brain is, and what seeming miracles Providence is capable of. It's experience that counts. Providence has a good many thousand years of experience, remember."

"That's a novel theologic argument!" murmured Jenks. "But, applied to the practical world, I must admit it has good points. However, don't belittle man's brains; they might be worse. Today we've learned how to cross a river. Tomorrow you'll learn how to cross a chasm. And tonight——"

"Tonight," said Fournier, "oil up your rifle and plug cotton in your ears. The howl of that *zeepie* can drive men mad, right enough."

"Where's the cotton?" slyly demanded the professor.

FOURNIER did not respond, but strode onward. Five minutes later he plucked at a tree in passing. Presently he turned, and with a whimsical look handed Jenks a little tuft of cotton. At the professor's blank stare, he broke into a laugh.

"Didn't you see that *guana* tree? The pods are nearly ready to burst now. You should see 'em in April or May, professor! Miniature snowstorm. Well, let's be going."

With the tag end of the afternoon they were on the flank of the Twin Mountain itself, following a well-defined trail. MacDonald, still somewhat huffed, kept well in the lead, and was lost to sight.

The two who followed him came presently upon a startling scene. The trail followed a shoulder of the hill and curled beneath a *precipicio* of rock, a fall of sheer three hundred feet or even more, as clean-hewn as if cut with a knife. Midway of this MacDonald had halted and was staring up. Near him was a pool of red, which went on trickling across the trail and down the hill shoulder. It came from a thin trickle which he was following with his eye, up and up the cliff for two hundred feet.

There, from the mouth of a cavern opening, came the trickle of red, a constant stream of it. As Fournier and Jenks pushed forward they were assailed by a sinister stench; Fournier looked at the pool, and could not repress a shudder at sight of the clotted, coagulated mass. Blood!

"Gruta de Sangre," commented Mac, waving his pipe. "Yon's the place they tell fearsome stories aboot!"

"Blood!" exclaimed Jenks, astare. "Is it blood?"

"I wull not say it's no'," said Mac cannily. "But ye'll notice I'm not sayin' it's so."

He touched Fournier's arm and pointed to the dirt about the pool, where showed plain the marks of puma and jaguar, *danto* and wild cattle. A trifle nauseated by the sight and odor, Fournier turned away, but Jenks eagerly pressed forward and knelt at the pool. After a moment he rose, smiling curiously.

"It's slimy, not tacky like blood," he said. "A thermic spring loaded with sulfur and lime, which dissolves some other component up above. Let's climb and see."

Mac grunted, pointed to the utterly blank cliff face and picked up his pack.

"Another spring just ahead," he said. "Guid water. Maybe this is sulfur and maybe not, but I ken it's what they ca' the Gruta de Sangre, and that's enough for me."

"This is our camp," assented Fournier, "but for Heaven's sake let's get up-wind. Come on, Jenks! No man alive could climb that cliff."

The professor followed, reluctantly.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT ONE WOULD NOT DO FOR HIRE

SUNRISE beheld the three white men accompanying, up the mountain trail, the Indian guide who had been sent to them as promised.

This guide was a merry fellow, and, unlike the usual Indian, a great talker. Perhaps, as Jenks suggested, he had been ordered to talk freely; *quien sabe?* On the subject of the *zeepie* he was fairly garrulous.

"It-that-walks-up has two long legs behind and two short ones in front," was the substance of his confidences. "He is the size of a six-months' calf and is covered with long, silky hair, creamy white, lustrous. He walks erect except on very rough ground. He has the face of a man with huge eyes, surrounded by a fringe of the long hair. His short fore-legs have long claws and disembowel any victim he seizes.

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"No, *senores*, I never saw him. Others have seen It-that-walks-up, but only at night, when he comes to take the offerings, women, or victims left for him. He has feet like a man, but they are set on backward."

Fournier grinned at the professor.

"A *zeepie* sitting in a *lujlu* tree and zeeping mournfully over the sins of the Indians, is a large-sized thought! This backs up the legends, professor. What d'you think?"

"Why think at all?" rejoined Jenks cheerfully. "Let's await the event."

"This yarn," went on Fournier, "is like the story of the Sesimite, down in Olancho. The Sesimite is a giant female ape, who hauls off an occasional gent to mate with her in the forest. I've never been hauled personally, so can't vouch for the lady. It's a common belief, however, and when we finish this job, if you care to look her up——"

"Hush!" exclained Jenks. "Hush! Good Heavens, man, what a place! Look at it!"

They had debouched suddenly upon the open mesa which crowned the mountain. The four men came to a halt, while the Indian watched the faces of the three whites, not without pride. And there was reason for his pride.

Before them lay the irregular crest of San Pedro, perhaps a half-mile in diameter; the crest of the northern peak was beyond their sight, hidden by jutting crags. This tableland had once formed the lower part of a gigantic volcano, the cone of which had blown off to create San Pablo, the northern mountain.

The center of this mesa was occupied by a lagoon of clear waters, sparkling in the new sunlight. The three white men had reached the summit at the eastern side. Directly opposite them was the pueblo of Pijul, a half-ruinous mass of structures, builded and walled about with blocks of lava. On every hand, except at the extreme northern end of the peak, which was rocky, the earth was highly cultivated. This earth was a rich black loam, which had apparently been packed up here by hand.

"Mind your step, now!" cautioned MacDonald. "It's likely we're watched verra close, and I'm unco' anxious to keep body an' soul togither yet awhile."

His warning was not without cause, for their guide was beckoning to them earnestly. All that morning they had encountered no one, while the mesa and the pueblo across the lagoon appeared empty of all humanity. It was evident that the Xicaques were holding themselves far out of sight, and it was equally evident that any infraction of the truce terms would be met with prompt chastisement.

AT THIS instant there burst upon them, with horrible and piercing clarity, the cry of It-that-walks-up.

The guide flung himself to the ground, hands to ears. The three white men clutched at their weapons and faced the northern and rocky edge of the mesa, whence that cry seemed to come. They could see nothing.

At their first hearing, they had been miles distant, yet the unearthly sound of that cry had appalled them. Now it filled earth and sky with strident horror, a sibilation that scorched the ears; its ghastly vibratory note pierced into the very soul. Suddenly it broke into the fearful harmonic—and ceased. Upon the awful silence crept the mutter of MacDonald's voice.

"Aye, the deil's playin' his penny trumpet, blast him!"

The disgusted tone broke the spell. Fournier and Jenks laughed shakily. The trembling guide was hauled up by MacDonald, then broke from the white and hastened forward. The three followed him.

Behind them lay the mesa, the lagoon, the pueblo; they clambered among pinnacled rocks which crested the northern edge of the peak. Wind-tortured pines clung in the crannies, heaving distorted arms to the sky. Here and there some sturdier seed had taken root—an occasional *balsamo negro* and coyolo palm. Then abruptly, the four men were standing on the brink of the abyss.

The sight which greeted them was unpromising. The entire north edge of the peak ended in a precipice abrupt and straight as though sheared off by some mighty cleaver. The line of it could be seen running from side to side; obviously there was no way around. Fifty feet distant at this point lay the verge of the northern peak, that of San Pablo. This, like San Pedro, was a mesa, but consisted of a jumbled pile of rock masses, scantily forested—a bleak and barren prospect where no living thing, not even a bird, was in sight.

Here was the narrowest point of the

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chasm, which widened irregularly on either hand. Here, if they were to cross, the crossing must be made. It looked impossible.

"Hm! Don't wonder the redskins never went over there," observed Fournier, surveying the opposite peak. "Nothing to go for except rocks, apparently. All right, professor! We're ready if you are. Let's cross."

Jenks displayed some agitation. Murmuring that he had forgotten something, he drew their guide to one side, displayed his automatic pistol, and talked at length. The eyes of the Indian glittered. A moment more, and the man went away at a run.

"A fine prospect!" grunted MacDonald, sitting down and filling his pipe. "I ken the scheme well, Flake. Our highly educated mannie yonder would be cuttin' down a tree and makin' it fa' over the gulf by way of a brig. Oh, aye!"

Fournier looked to right and left. The edge of the chasm was bare of trees; that scheme was an impossibility. He glanced at the professor, smilingly.

"Mac has his doubts, apparently! Never mind, old man; I'll put my money on you. Any orders to give?"

"Not yet, thanks." Jenks tugged at his silky fringe of beard, and inspected the other peak. "You don't see anything of the *zeepie?* Singular! He must be close at hand."

"I'm inclined to side with Mac," said Fournier, "that it's no animal, but the foul fiend in person! Never heard such an infernal noise in my life."

"I never said so!" interjected Mac with asperity. "Haud in wi' your puttin' words in ma mouth! I'm able to do that for ma own sef'. Yon's neither beastie nor deil."

"Oh!" said Fournier, who delighted to ride his partner. "If you know so confounded much, suppose you enlighten us! What is the delicate creature, then?"

Mac gave him a slow and scornful glance.

"Ye wad no' believe me if I told ye," he uttered. "So I'll keep ma thoughts close."

"Bluff!" snorted Jenks.

Mac grunted and continued to smoke placidly without retort. No sign of life appeared on San Pablo. The gulf at their feet ended in obscurity; Fournier dropped a stone, and the echoes rolled for half a minute, telling them little.

Suddenly their guide appeared, running. Jenks rose and went to meet him, while the other two men watched. Grinning, the Indian laid three axes on the stones, and beside them a huge *vijao* leaf. A few words were exchanged. Jenks unbuckled his pistol-belt and laid it on the big leaf, took up the axes and came to join his companions. The Indian folded the leaf over the belt and weapon, laid a stone on top, and squatted down to watch what happened.

"Made a trade," said Jenks, unnecessarily. "Ax for each of us. Come along, boys, and we'll get to work. I'll guarantee to have you over in an hour."

He led the way toward the nearest trees, a hundred feet distant. It was significant that, if he left his rifle by his pack, the other two men carried theirs.

"How wide do you figure the gulf?" asked Jenks. "I make it fifty feet without stopping to tape it. Nobody over there to hold the tape, anyhow,"

Fournier chuckled.

"Close enough. I'd say forty-five."

"Just aboot," said Mac cautiously. "I'd no say fifty, but——"

Jenks had found a fairly straight pine, paced off the shadow, and proclaimed it a good seventy feet high. At his orders, Mac and Fournier attacked it with their axes. Jenks tackled two small trees. He had them down, trimmed, cut into short lengths and dragged to the chasm by the time the tall pine quivered and crashed.

All three men waded into the prostrate pine, Jenks appearing to know exactly what he wanted done. When the trunk was lopped, he paced it and cut ten feet from the top.

"About an even sixty left," he declared, eying the trunk. "She'll do fine. Can we roll her to the brink?"

"Get some of those levers you chopped and we may," said Fournier.

Jenks grinned.

"They're not levers, in that sense, but I will."

The levers were brought and the log was rolled.

What followed, came with astonishing rapidity—astonishing, that is, to Mac and Fournier, neither of whom at first perceived just what Jenks was about. As the professor said, it was the simplest thing on earth—when done right!

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Jenks selected a second huge pine, which when felled and lopped provided a thirty-foot timber. The watching Indian provided twisted lines. With the short levers, Jenks built "pigpens" under each log—two beneath the long timber, one under the shorter piece, teetering the logs up and adding to the pens as each raised itself. Following, the two timbers were lapped and firmly roped together.

Jenks now had an eighty-foot stringer resting on three "pigpens" of short pieces. He knocked away the two end pens, which left the entire jointed piece balanced on the central pen, which served as fulcrum. The three men caught hold, swung the log, gave a final push—and the chasm was bridged.

"Now you've learned something!" panted Jenks triumphantly. "If you want a real bridge, throw another stringer across and use the pigpen sections for cross pieces. This is good enough for us, however."

With that, he caught up his pack and rifle, stepped on the log and calmly walked across. The other two gasped at the reckless audacity of him; then, as he stepped ashore at the other verge of the gulf, looked at each other.

"I would no' walk that brig for a million pesos!" declared MacDonald firmly.

Fournier shrugged. His bronzed features were a trifle white, and his sharp eyes glittered on the "bridge." Then he threw his rifle under his arm.

"Neither would I, Mac," he said quietly. "Money couldn't hire me. But—by Heavens, I'm not in this game for money!"

He jumped to the log and set forth.

Fournier was not inspired by the eager exultation of Jenks—the flame which burned in the scientist's brain kindled no spark of enthusiasm in him. Jenks was carried away, swept on and above all thought of danger. Fournier and Mac were weighing every chance.

Midway of the log, Fournier's boot slipped on a patch of moss. The pack, hitched to his shoulder, swung sidewise. For a moment the man wavered, dropping his rifle, flinging arms wide in air to regain balance—in vain. His boot slipped again, his feet went from under him.

He pitched forward, gripping and clutching at the log with his bare hands as he fell.

CHAPTER V

WHO STARTS MUST FINISH

WHEN Fournier plunged down, a terrible cry burst from MacDonald.

A leap took the burly Scot to the log. His arm curved; his rifle flew into the air, described an arc and fell clattering near Jenks on the other side the gulf. His pack was discarded. Head down, eyes straining at their sockets, his bellow of grief and despair echoing from the chasm beneath, MacDonald rushed across the quivering log as if upon a solid stone causeway.

No sound had come from Fournier. As he fell his right hand caught at the binding of twisted vines which roped the logs together at their junction—caught, gripped, held to the shock of his body's weight. Now he was clawing for a hold with his other hand, ineffectually.

Jenks set foot upon the log as if to come to the rescue. Mac bellowed furiously:

"Back, ye gomeril! Back! Won't hold!"

Nor would it hold. Beneath the weight of Fournier, beneath the stamping tread of MacDonald, the log was bending at the lapped junction. If the vines snapped——

His face ghastly with his crawling horror of the gulf below, MacDonald fairly leaped across the shaking bridge. He came to Fournier, still hanging by one hand, and halted. For an instant the paralyzed Jenks thought he, too, would go down, for he reeled, threw out both arms, hesitated. Then he came down astride the log, settled himself, and reached down one hand to the free hand of Fournier.

"Easy does it, Mac," said the latter coolly. "Bring me up behind you—too much strain here where the logs join."

That cool voice seemed to quiet the furious madness of MacDonald—who was, in truth, overpowered by a tremendous fear of the chasm. Inch by inch he drew up his hand, while the log-bridge bent and groaned as the vines stretched. At every instant they might part, sundering the logs, sending logs and men together into the gulf.

"Good!" directed Fournier's calm tones. "Let go my hand—grab my collar, Mac. That's the boy. Steady me a second—fine! I'm up. Get off the bridge, now; get off quick! Get off *quick!*"

Fournier, arm and leg curled over the log, was safe to swing himself up. MacDonald, however, threatened to succumb

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to the reaction—threatened to sink down upon the log with fear plunging at him.

The urgent voice of Fournier, suddenly leaping into vibrant shrillness, tore through MacDonald, steadied him, forced him to the frightful necessity of rising and going on. He did it, by a miracle. He came erect, his face drawn and horrible, sweat streaming from his cheeks. He staggered forward, growling hoarse, frightened oaths, and then, at the solid ground, dashed aside the hand of Jenks and flung himself down. He was nauseated. No one but Fournier could know what agonies the man had suffered.

Fournier himself swung up on the log, rose to his feet, looked calmly down into the yawning chasm beneath, and then strode on across. He smiled at Jenks, made a sign of caution and jerked his thumb toward MacDonald. This man seemed made of iron.

"Leave Mac alone for a bit," he said casually. "He was born with a horror of dizzy places. If you'd given us warning of your scheme I'd have told you. You rushed us. Can't blame you, of course, but leave Mac alone for a bit. Don't refer to it—the thought will sicken him for days."

"But man, he *ran* across!" exclaimed Jenks, staring.

Fournier gave him a singular look, then suddenly exploded in one of his rare oaths.

" —— in heaven!" His voice cracked. "Don't you see—don't you see? It was for me——"

He turned away, nervously fumbling at his pipe.

Jenks sat down, wiped the sweat from his face, and stared at the two men. If Fláke Fournier were without fear, MacDonald was the better man—for Mac had faced awful fear and had conquered it. The professor's eyes dwelt upon the two with an awed humility in their flaming depths; for here he had encountered something greater than science, more tremendous than all bookish lore. And, because he was himself a man's man, he understood.

A slight cracking sound—another. Jenks looked up, looked at the bridge, sprang to his feet. He was in time to see the two ends slither from the rocks. The vine-ropes had parted. A moment later came a subdued crash from somewhere below.

This crash brought MacDonald to his feet, still nauseated but doggedly driving himself up. His bloodshot eyes fell upon the gaze of Fournier; no word passed between the two, but no word was needed here. Eye spoke to eye, heart to heart.

"I've got your rifle, Mac," said Fournier, without emotion. "Let's move. Ready, professor? Cursed silly of me not to have slung my rifle over my shoulder. Keep your eye peeled for It-that-walks up—though they say he only comes out at night."

Fournier turned his back on the chasm and stepped out. The others followed.

No trail was visible. This peak of San Pablo seemed utterly deserted, tenantless. Fournier found himself facing a wilderness of jagged rocks whelmed in a topsyturvy mass, pierced only by scattered trees. Within five minutes, among these rocks, both the chasm and the higher peak of San Pedro were lost to sight.

There was no breeze here amid these tangled stone masses. Beating down upon the chaotic fragments of gray stone, the sun was unchecked, unrelieved. Here the sunlight became a blinding flood of tangible, quivering heat; it poured down like rain, suffocating the senses, its radiance refracted on every hand and increased a thousandfold.

Fournier sniffed the air, with an oath of disgust; that odor like old and musty straw came to all of them. No need to seek the source—there they lay among the ovenstones, rattler and *chingo*, *terciopelo* and *barba maria*, in a perfect paradise for basking reptiles. Undisturbed here for generations, probably never knowing the sight of man, these creatures regarded the intruders with eyes like living jewels and showed no sign of trepidation.

"Let's get oot o' this!" came from Mac. "We're not makin' a mile an hour."

The three men glanced at each other; it was true. Loathing of the place fell upon them all alike. Climbing among these rocks that closed them in like trees, they made no progress, could see nothing, got nowhere. The memory of that frightful cry, of the nerve-racking chasm incident, was strong upon them. The sickening heat addled their brains. The singular curiosity of the countless reptiles unstrung them.

"It's kettle of purgatory—Lord, what a snake stench!" said Fournier hoarsely. "Mac's right. Out of it, out of it!"

The other two plunged forward after him, sweating horribly, panting with the

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heat. They scrambled on, kicking reptiles aside, seeking only to extricate themselves. Even Fournier, that iron man, felt horror of the place working yeastily within him. It was like a nightmare, incredible and overpowering.

Like a nightmare, too, it was suddenly over. They emerged from tortuous rock-windings into a breeze which struck upon their heated bodies like an icy breath. Here was an open shoulder of the mountain, splashed with mossy pines, that stretched down and away and finally merged with the jungle. They stood astare, gazing out across the splendid view of hill and valley and steamy jungle; yet it was no desire for glorious landscapes that had fetched them hither.

As by common consent they scanned the open declivity on which they stood. It was the north and east flank of San Pablo. The flat top of San Pedro was hidden by the rocks behind them. They were alone amid desolation, and yet——

"Hundred yards to our left, Mac," said Fournier calmly. "Pick it up?"

The shrewd eyes of MacDonald glittered from under his shaggy brows. He nodded.

"What is it?" queried Jenks, with eagerness.

"Trail. Come along."

Jenks could see no trail until he was almost upon it. Even then it was no more than a most indefinable marking, visible only when one swept his eye across the farther ground. The two guides examined it silently, carefully.

"Human feet, maybe, aye!" said Mac. "Are they set on backward?"

Fournier shrugged and smiled slightly, making no other answer. The trail, if such it were, ran back up the slope as if toward the chasm.

"Shall we go back," asked Fournier, "or follow it down?"

"Down," said Jenks without hesitation. "It must go somewhere."

Without argument the order was accepted. All three had become silent, nervous, watchful. Poise was difficult to regain; the return to normal was slow. Nothing took place, and the trail led gently downward; the trees thickened, monkeys and birds of the jungle appeared, and in an incredibly short time the jungle itself was ahead. Fournier halted.

"This is very singular!" he said, gazing about. "It is noon. Since dawn we have done what no other white man has done. We have seen the summit of San Pedro and the pueblo of Pijul. We have crossed the chasm between the peaks and have traversed the summit of San Pablo. Nothing has happened to us. Now we are about to enter the jungle whence we came—I don't like it! Either we've missed our objective——"

"Let's lunch," said Jenks. "A bite of food and a smoke will brace us up."

They ate. Food and tobacco, complete relaxation, all served to ease their minds and reduce the poignancy of the horrors behind them. Fournier fell to jesting about the *zeepie*, but at the mention of resuming their way, the professor shook his head reflectively.

"Why not stop here?" he demanded. "This is an excellent spot for a camp, if we can find water. So far as we know, the creature comes forth only at night. This trail indicates that he comes from the jungle and ascends to the chasm. Therefore, let us await him here!"

"Shoot him?" said McDonald.

"No, no! Capture him. Vines will make ropes——"

Mac grunted and fell to frowning. The suggestion of Jenks was adopted, however. Leaving the professor to make camp, the two partners went in search of water and food. Fournier found water, Mac returned with a *pava*, the so-called wild turkey, and growled disgustedly that the birds were so tame he had knocked one over with a stone.

One significant fact was outstanding: the existence of the *zeepie* was no longer denied.

CHAPTER VI

MOONLIGHT MADNESS

TO THE three white men camped there above the jungle verge, the time of waiting dragged most interminably. Night came, and found them in a state of high tension, of expectant suspense. The hours of darkness drew them taut.

For things had happened—sounds that focused all their faculties upon the green wall of the jungle below. Some extraordinary secret lay beneath that velvety mantle of rank vegetation. Fearing it, they were fascinated by it.

Once it was the scream of a woman, a

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sound unavoidably true and human, that broke and lifted in anguished eddies from the jungle. Not far distant, either. Fournier muttered something about the natives whom the *zeepie* had taken, and the others nodded assent. The scream had neither explanation nor repetition. It was weird.

Again, toward dusk, a series of indescribable sounds—the same clanging, piercing, vibratory notes they had previously heard. It was as if some one were hammering idly at a gong or bell. As MacDonald said, however, this was like no bell that he had ever heard in his life.

"Singular!" observed Jenks, when the last lingering cadence had died out. "There's no metal in that sound. Makes me think of the jade bells of the ancient Chinese—sounding stones, they were called. The shape and memory are preserved in the beautiful ornaments of jade suspended from stands and used as gifts. That may be some bird, Flake."

"Then it's a Chinese bird," retorted Fournier positively. "Not Honduran, at least. I'm off for slumberland—long night's work ahead."

Mac grunted something inaudible. The man was in a dour, silent mood; his few words were grimly ominous, as if he sensed trouble. Jenks scribbled notes absorbedly.

Night drew down, starry and impervious; the moon would rise late. Play as they might at sleep or guard-mount, each of the three men was nervously keyed up. Nothing took place, nothing was seen. The cry of the *zeepie*—if such it were—had not been heard since early morning. The usual night life of the jungle awoke, and at this Mac growled savagely as if it justified the inner bodings of his disgruntled self.

Then a glow on the horizon, and the full moon flooded the mountain-flank with silver sheen and lightened the wave-crests of the jungle with insistent fingers of mellow radiance. The three white men watched the jungle steadily, silence holding them. Once a jaguar broke cover and came toward them, for they were down-wind from the jungle, and suddenly halted in blazing terror of man. No one spoke. The beast waited, crouched and then was gone like a streak.

During the afternoon they had made ropes, twisting stout vines. Fournier, who had had much experience in the cattle-country below, had contrived a lasso. The monstrous creature, if he existed, was to be captured.

Suddenly Fournier moved slightly. His hand flitted out, touched the knee of Jenks and flitted back; then he was gone like a shadow into the shadows, lasso over his arm.

The other two men stared at the black mouth of the jungle where the trail vanished. They forced their lungs to more evened cadence, suppressed the startled catch-breath that rose in their throats. For, there against the blackness, was a lighter object, no more than a dimly vague patch.

Under their eyes it moved and grew, slowly drawing forward toward the moonlight, assuming grotesque and unreal proportions. Fournier, watching from beside a tree at the trail's edge, felt an absurdly hysterical impulse to cry out, to spring erect. Here was something undreamed, something abnormal and inhuman, monstrous——

Then upon Fournier fell a species of paralysis, a sheer instinctive horror of the frightful thing he beheld.

Into the flood of unbroken moonlight advanced the creature, every detail leaping forth into terrible clarity. Fournier saw the huge barrel of a body, with shaggy white hair from head to feet. A man or an ape, was his first thought; then the horror fell upon him.

Short fore-arms ending in a steely glitter of curved claws; the creature shambled half-erect upon legs formless and shapeless, masked by the white hair. Above all this, a face which was a travesty upon the face of man, rimmed by that same hair, with enormous and misshapen mouth and nostrils of a vivid scarlet. The eyes were huge, out of all human proportion—great scarlet plates in the center of which gleamed and glittered the eyeballs. Even in this moment of startled horror Fournier remembered that those eyes had not shone out from the jungle like the eyes of a beast. A little thing, perhaps.

Fournier crouched, his noose ready for the cast, and fought down his inner revulsion. Hardest of all feelings to combat, as this monster slowly advanced, was the impulse to drop hand to revolver and shoot, shoot, shoot in a madly desperate terror of the supernatural! The innate urge of man is to destroy the unnatural and the abnormal, lest by it he come to dire experience.

But Fournier was not here to do his own will, and his hand did not move from the

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twisted line. The arrangements were made. The others had lines also. When Fournier had noosed the monster they were to spring forth and secure the captive. He wanted to glance toward them, but dared not lift his gaze from the thing—It-that-walks-up! The Indians had named it well.

Whether man or animal, or both, the monster shambled slowly forward at a rapid pace—this remarkable paradox was, of course, an ocular illusion. The creature had very short legs, which moved very rapidly; thus, while appearing to move very fast, his barrel of a body actually covered the ground slowly. Fournier was too whelmed by astonished horror to figure this out until later. At the moment he perceived only that in the monster's progress was something unnatural and grotesque.

But the moment for action was at hand. The unnamed thing was a dozen feet distant and Fournier dared not risk discovery. He stepped out from behind his tree and whirled his lasso—swiftly, but with a deadly cold precision.

At sight of Fournier the monster came to a halt in palpable astonishment. In this moment the line circled out, the noose fell over the head of the creature. Fournier jerked it taut.

"Get him, you fools!" he cried sharply, angrily.

He was dragged a little. The *zeepie* was struggling, drawing back. Fournier was aware of Jenks and Mac, each hindering the other—and then the monster opened his lips and uttered a cry of fright, anger, terror, which was so fearfully human that even Fournier was startled anew.

All this transpired in the catch of a breath. One instant the picture—Fournier, hauling on his line, the unearthly monster at the other end struggling madly; and then all was changed. The short, flapper-like arms of the beast were waving frantically. Suddenly there was a flash, like the steel of a knife, and Fournier staggered backward and fell. The line was parted.

Fournier's oath was echoed by Jenks and Mac. The fraction of a second too late, they plunged forward; the monster was already scuttling for the jungle. Jenks tripped in his own line and went down. Mac flung himself bodily at the creature—only to discover that Jenks also had hold of his own line, and to be jerked back. Before he could recover, the monster was out of the moonlight and gone. MacDonald uttered a storm of oaths.

"Very prettily bungled!" observed Fournier bitterly. "If we had——"

A shot splashed redly at the edge of the jungle and the bullet went between Fournier and the professor. Mac caught up his rifle and pumped three bullets into the blackness before Fournier caught his arm.

"Don't do it, Mac! That's probably one of the captive Indian women shooting at us—the beast is their lord and master, you know. Let's go on——"

Mac turned about, furiously.

"I told ye!" he cried out. "I told ye to shoot first! And noo wi' your lines and ropes and a', he's gone. You and your women! It was himsel' pulled a gun on us."

"Creature without hands can't use a gun," snapped Fournier.

Mac uttered a snarl.

"And wha said he had no hands? Dinna ye ken——"

"Forget it, boys, forget it!" intervened the professor. "My fault entirely. That cry of his was so confounded human it took my nerve. I bungled the ropes. What now?"

"After him," said Fournier calmly. "Wait till I get the packs."

He strode off. The professor stared, then looked at MacDonald.

"Eh? Surely he can't mean to follow the *zeepie?* It'd be madness, into that jungle! We'd be ambushed——"

"Aye, Flake's a bit wrathfu'," said Mac. "And when he's like that, lord help us a'! He'll gie ye one look from yon icy face and tell ye to go to ——; that is, ye ken, if ye cross him! So, mannie, dinna cross him."

This was Mac's longest speech in days, but it was excellent advice. When Fournier rejoined them with the loads and started for the edge of the jungle, revolver in hand, no dissent was voiced. He stalked forward, face set harshly, eyes on the darkness. He did not understand how that line had been severed so cleanly, as if by a knife, nor did he understand that shot from the edge of the jungle.

"Now's our best chance," he curtly told his companions, "to follow him while he's running—keep him on the run, give him no chance to show fight, find his hole! We

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can't hope to take him alive now, professor."

"Fair enough; I'll pay for my bungling," said Jenks. "Take him dead, then!"

They drove on into blackness.

The trail brought them to a tunnel that pierced the jungle, and Fournier went into it without hesitation. The blackness was pierced now and again by a ray of moonlight, but infrequently. Fournier, to his surprize, found that this was no mere *danto* tunnel, but a large and well-made trail. At one of the moonlit points he perceived that the work had been done with machetes or knives.

Assuming that the monster was at least partly human, Fournier pressed on in the belief that the boldest was the safest course. The sight of strange white men would undoubtedly create consternation. That this belief was well founded, was borne out by the event—or rather, by the lack of it. There was no ambush. The jungle seemed empty, even of animal life.

And so, with abruptness, came the unexpected end of the jungle trail. From utter darkness the three men came suddenly into a silver glory of moonlight and halted there in blank wonder before the thing which was revealed to them.

CHAPTER VII

THE CITY OF SILENCE

BEFORE them, the three men saw a river, a wide and sluggish stream, and across this river was a bridge or causeway of hewn stone. The moonlight struck it into whiteness, intensified the wonder of it in this place.

The moonlight did more than this; perhaps it sifted some of its own iridescence into the brains of those three men. They stood in silence, staring at that bridge of hewn stone, and what lay beyond it. Here was one of those indescribable moments when the brain seems to exert a visual acuity to which the eye of flesh can not attain. It comes at a time of rapture, of sorrow, of deep emotion or nervous tension; it comes and goes again in a flash, and sometimes the flash lingers.

On the far side of this low-running stream was a half circle, a fan-shaped segment of jungle. The back of this lay to the west and north, against a sheer precipice, a flank of the Twin Mountain. Straight as an arrow across this jungle patch, from the other side of the stone bridge, ran a road of stone. This white road went no great distance when it suddenly turned toward heaven and ended in midair. Such was the scene.

It was singular, perhaps, that to each of the three men this scene presented illusions and inferences which were identical. At any other time they might have waited for daylight before comprehending what they saw; but now they paused not. Fournier, after a moment, put away his revolver and pointed.

"An excellent location for a city!" he murmured, absorbed in his thought. "Admirable! The river makes a great bend below the cliffs; the position answers every requirement of defense and living. Once more, it seems, Dame Rumor has told the truth."

Yet there was no city here—only the jungle.

"Aye," assented Mac musingly. "Ye mind how yon jungle rises and falls? That'll be the buildings. And the darker mass in behind—where a *temblor* dropped a chunk o' mountain over part of the city, an' dammed the river. There'll be a bit lake over under those cliffs, aye."

"And the road—the road that ends in the sky!" exclaimed the agitated voice of Jenks. "That must be the teocalli, the pyramid! It stands in about the center of the whole. Look how the jungle rises at that point—the teocalli of the town, beyond doubt! And this road has been cleared directly to its summit!"

Again, silence. Upon the three fell a species of awe, of terror, at sight of that naked road of stone. They knew only too well that the clearing of it had necessitated the work of many hands, for long periods. What was the explanation? Were there men in this place—men, as well as monsters?

Suddenly Fournier broke the silence, his voice cold, impassive, controlled.

"Simple enough, boys. Our friend the *zeepie* had an object in collecting dusky ladies—an object other than a harem, it appears! They have cleared this road for him. Therefore, so much the less work for us."

He took up again the professor's pack, which he had been carrying. But MacDonald did not move to follow to the stone bridge.

"I'll bide here," said Mac. "Go you on."

"Eh?" Fournier turned sharply. "What's

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this, Mac? You can't stop here alone——"

"Aye." Mac smiled grimly. "I'll do juist that, Flake. Go you and stir up the beastie; he'll run this way. I'll get him."

There was sense to this, as both the other men realized at once. Apparently there was but the one way between mountain and jungle. There was more than a chance that the *zeepie* would double back on his own trail.

"We can't do it, Mac!" spoke out Jenks. "It's not fair to you——"

Fournier took the professor's arm and gently urged him forward. They parted thus, wordless; as the two men strode across the stone causeway, they heard MacDonald's dry, grim chuckle behind. But, when they looked back, he had vanished in the shadows.

"Don't worry about Mac," said Fournier calmly. "The old rascal has the edge on us. He knows something, or he has a hunch—I've thought all the while that he was holding out on us! Never mind. Hello! This roadway has been cleared a month or so——"

As he spoke, Fournier, who had no rifle, stooped and picked up several lopped limbs of trees from the edge of the cleared road. Carrying these, he took the lead. The professor followed. Fournier did not see that twice Jenks wavered in his step, staggering a little.

The cleared space was a dozen feet in width, walled by the ragged jungle edge, the stones white in the moonlight. The two men had no horizon save the jungle, no perspective except the road before and behind them. As they advanced, they could make out more clearly the singular nature of the road ahead.

"Hold on a moment, Flake," said Jenks suddenly. "You'd better take this rifle of mine. Give me your wood. What's it for—torches?"

Fournier nodded tacit assent. He dropped the wood, took the rifle that Jenks handed him and turned again. The professor stooped for the two or three sticks, rose, staggered, and fell into step behind Fournier. It was well that the latter did not observe his face, for it held a strange expression.

They pressed forward. No sound, no indication from It-that-walks-up, came to them from the darkness. The road of hewn stones drew out, widened slightly and became a great flight of stone stairs that ended nowhere apparently.

"Most extraordinary!" said the professor. His voice was forced, tense; Fournier laid the tone to excitement. "It is accepted, I believe, that the stairways of the Aztec teocallis wound about the outside of the pyramid, while this one ascends abruptly——"

"It's a climb," grunted Fournier. "Each step a foot high! Here goes."

A climb it was. Fournier, watching the jungle that still hemmed them in, watching the stone stairs for any sign of ambush, shoved himself forward. Behind him, Jenks climbed more slowly, gradually losing ground. Half-way up the ascent Fournier found himself several steps in advance and paused.

"Winded?" he inquired.

"A trifle," responded the professor. "Go ahead."

Fournier obeyed.

Reaching the top, he stood searching the place with his eyes, listening for any sound from MacDonald. None came. He reached a hand down to Jenks, helped him up the last two steps. Behind them the white road stretched out like a ribbon of silver, empty.

The summit of the teocalli was flat and square, each side measuring about twenty yards. The overhanging jungle growth had been cleared to the edge of the platform, which was littered with stone débris and piles of masonry. At the far side of the platform was the arched entrance of a small stone cubicle. Fournier advanced toward this.

He halted before a huge slab of yellowish-green obsidian, which must have weighed two hundred pounds. It was suspended by a hole in the center of its longest diameter, from a tree-beam laid across two ruinous masses of stone. A laugh broke from Fournier.

"Here's our great bell, professor! You were close enough to the truth at that, with your Chinese sounding-stone notion——"

He struck the slab with his rifle-butt. The air volleyed and thrummed with a clangor of sound—the same steely, insistent bell-note they had heard afar. Now it deafened them, vibrant and penetrating, the resonance lingering an intolerable while. Fournier struck the bell again and again, then turned to the little cubby of stone.

He went to the door of this, and struck a match. He withdrew hastily, backing into

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Jenks, and muttered something under his breath.

"Eh?" queried Jenks. "What is it?"

"Death." Fournier's face was white and set in the moonlight. "Indian woman—where's that devil? Where is he? Nothing here. No rooms. Don't go in there—ugh! She's lying across a stone table——"

"The altar of sacrifice!" cried out Jenks. "Good Heavens, man—we've found the thing intact! There must be a hole in the roof—the sun strikes down at noon, touches the heart of the victim— Ah! There must be chambers below, inside the teocalli. We must have missed the entrance as we came up——"

"Stay here," snapped Fournier.

He dropped the rifle, took out his revolver, grasped one of the fragments of dry wood and started across the platform, running. His figure vanished at the head of the stairs.

Professor Jenks stood, gazing around. Nothing but the ribbon of empty stone road—the summit of the pyramid was an island of stone set amid a green-black jungle sea. The man's deep eyes were ablaze with an intense exultation—and with something else. Even in the moonlight, the flush of fever showed sharply in his cheeks.

"The altar!" he murmured. "I—I must see that——"

He knelt above the dry sticks, fumbling for one. His shaking fingers wasted two matches before a flame caught. Holding the smoky torch, he went to the doorway of the sacrificial chamber.

For a moment he stood there, then passed inside. From the doorway showed the murky glow of his flambeau, holding the square opening outlined in a reddish light. This light remained a short time; suddenly, abruptly, it vanished.

THE moon struck white on the teocalli platform. Nothing moved there; the grunting of a wild hog lifted from the jungle depths, showing that some life stirred down below, impacting upon the silence. Then it ceased, and all was quiet again.

After a time this quiet was broken by the scramble of booted feet on stone. Up the steep ascent of the teocalli came Fournier, climbing wearily, toiling from step to step. He had found empty rooms, chambers showing signs of recent tenancy, but the bird had flown.

He came to the summit, and paused.

"No use," he said in a disgusted voice. "Too late, confound it! Hope old Mac lands the brute——"

His voice died out as the eery silence struck him. His eyes searched the platform for the professor, in vain.

Alarmed, he strode forward. He called out the name of Jenks, twice, and had no reply. He looked about the clumps of fallen masonry, came at last to the entrance of the sacrificial chamber. Here he paused only to strike a match, then darted inside.

An instant later he reappeared, now dragging the limp form of the professor. Out in the brilliant moonlight he stooped over the inanimate form, searching hastily. He found nothing.

Startled, angered, desperate, he began to strip Jenks. Suddenly his hand, touching the left thigh, jerked sharply back from abnormally swollen flesh. He tried to unfasten the leather puttee and failed—the leg had swollen about it.

Fournier jerked out his knife, ripped the leg and thigh into sight. He looked down at swollen, darkened flesh, his lips compressed; he found the evidence of puncture, just above his knee.

"——!" he said coldly. Coming from him that word was as a volley of oaths. "I'll have to get Mac here——"

He reached for his pistol. As he lifted the weapon, the jungle vomited a shot—a second shot—a third. The first and last were the deep notes of MacDonald's Winchester.

Fournier put away his weapon with a shrug, and bent to the task before him.

CHAPTER VIII

EVERY HOUSE HAS TWO DOORS

FOR the third time, Fournier strode across the platform to the stairs, looked in vain for any trace of MacDonald, and returned to the professor. With the moonlight was mingling the first grayness of dawn, and the silvery radiance was dimmed with the blending of day.

"Didn't want to say anything," muttered Jenks. He lay half in coma, half in delirium. He had felt nothing of Fournier's desperate and brutal surgery.

"Causeway ahead—too much depends on us," muttered the voice. "Spoiled the

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game once. If I do it again everything may be ruined. Say nothing. Couldn't see what kind of snake it was, anyway. Take a chance——"

The voice of Jenks trailed off into silence.

Flake Fournier had done his best, and now could only await the issue. Now he lighted his pipe and gazed steadily at Jenks, whose mutterings told him the whole story.

"It's a rum go!" he reflected. "As we came down through the jungle to that stone bridge, a snake must have bitten him. He said nothing—finding the city held him spellbound and he thought the bite was harmless. Hm! What did it, I've no idea, but he's in a bad way."

True enough. Fournier had small fear that Jenks would die, but he knew that Jenks would be ill, was even now gripped in a delirium of fever.

And he had not the least idea whether MacDonald were living or dead. Those three shots from the jungle had shown Mac to be a busy man; when able, he would come here. But he had not yet come, and time had passed. It looked bad. Things looked bad all around. Jenks was out of commission, at best; food was gone, and no water nearer than the stream; around was impassable jungle—the only road out was the back trail. A bleak prospect!

"Sipi-sipi-sipi——"

Fournier shuddered; at that sound, his iron nerves began to crack. The sibilant, strident cry came welling up from the jungle near by, yet there was no placing it, for it filled all the air and clamored to the stars. Now it wavered, broke to the harmonic, and began all over. To the imagination of Fournier, it contained a note of demoniac triumph, a shrilling pæan of exultation. Suddenly it ended midway and Fournier heard the echoes tumbling from the near-by cliffs.

"Mac's done for." And Fournier rose, knocked out his pipe and pocketed it. "Now the—the *thing* will come to finish us. Well, I'll pay up for Mac and for that poor woman in there!"

He glanced toward the sacrificial chamber, then went to retrieve the rifle of Jenks. With this in hand, he walked to the stairhead and looked down. He saw nothing. The day was slowly drifting up, the moonlight was blurred, everything was indistinct. Fournier stood leaning on the rifle, and waited.

After that shrill and awful cry he had not the slightest doubt that MacDonald was dead. Dead, and waiting for the kites.

He stood there an intolerable while, his smoldering eyes sweeping jungle, road, stairs. Behind him lay Jenks, breathing deeply and stertorously. Slowly the day drew forward, little by little the cold moonlight yielded and shrank before the warmer spectrum of the dawn. The tall cliffs sloped upward on three sides, the jungle heaved under its misty vapors that writhed like teased cotton; the stars died in their serried ranks, as from the eastern sky reached out the first impalpable dawn-spears thrusting at the wan moon.

The man lifted his face to the dawn, a face haggard, deeply seamed.

"Rosy-fingered Aurora!" he murmured. "Old Homer had it right. He had everything right, I guess! Well, Laertides, you and Mac will like each other, and I'll be along one of these days to take a hand in the story-telling by the chimney-corner. Chimney-corner in hell, with me and Odysseus and Mandeville yarning away—here, here! Steady down; no more of that drivel. Old man, you're getting balmy."

He sighed, shook himself, looked again down the length of stairs. A sudden tremor shook his body. He craned forward, a blaze of unholy eagerness in his eyes.

Aye, there it was, beyond mistake! A moving mass, down there in the shadows, a creeping something that was crawling up those stairs. It bulked huge and shapeless, down in the dim obscurity where the new day could not yet touch; a formless horror that moved.

Fournier lifted his rifle, cocked it, waited. A smile curved his thin lips. This creature could not be the *zeepie*, for it seemed to have no shape; it must be some other nameless monster, some crawling, fiendish spawn of unknown depths. Well, so much the better! After all——

Suddenly the man started, leaned forward, astonishment in his eyes as an abrupt focus showed him the truth. No monster after all! Two men—two men climbing the stone stairs, and the first man bearing on his shoulders an immense bag or sack.

"Oh, Flake! You up there?"

It was the voice of MacDonald. Fournier, who had taken a step backward, could not speak. He showed himself to the two ascending figures, then stepped back again,

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fighting to regain self-control. Yes, Mac was the rearmost figure. Good old Mac!

But the other—this man with the huge sack? No matter. Fournier turned and walked to the side of Jenks. The professor was muttering in fever. For a space Fournier stood above him with head bent; then, at a grunt and a scrape of feet, he turned to the two arrivals.

They had come to the platform. The first-comer had dropped the huge bag and, under the leveled rifle of MacDonald, held his arms in air.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Fournier, his eyes widening. "Why—why, Mac—you don't mean to tell me——"

"Oh, aye," said Mac imperturbably. "It's him, right enough! Johnny Long. Juan Barella, if ye need his real—eh! Mannie, is yon the professor?"

Fournier did not, could not, respond. He could only stare at Juan Barella with an increasing comprehension which slowly mastered his incredulity.

He beheld a half-breed who was known in the lowlands as Johnny Long—a man great and powerful of body, very short of leg, who bore no good reputation. Now he saw that Johnny Long was clad in a tattered remnant of white Angora chaps and coat; from the breast of this coat depended one empty sleeve, and a piece of another was extant. Thrusting his arms through these sleeves, the man could thus not only distort the shape of his body, but could appear to have monstrous little arms——

"And red paint on his face," muttered Fournier. "So this is the *zeepie!*"

"Is Jenks hurt?" demanded Mac.

Fournier nodded, broke into a harsh laugh. His eyes bit at the sullen half-breed.

"You dog!" he said. "Degenerate that you are, murderer of women—you are to die."

The cold calm of his voice was terrible. The prisoner blanched.

"Wull ye haud in?" snapped Mac irritably. "He's mine. I caught him makin' awa' with his loot. Chipped his skull with a bullet. Man, ye should see the fine noise-makin' apparatus down yonder! A bellows and——"

Fournier waved this aside. He understood now that the cry of the *zeepie* had come from a mechanical thorax; this Johnny Long had a reputation for making such things. All was now patent, dreadfully plain. Mystery and horror were gone.

Fournier was quite cold, very quiet.

"Mac, there's the devil to pay—this particular devil," and he looked at the half-breed.

Not understanding the words, the latter read the iron eyes.

"Mercy, *señores!*" he broke out.

Fournier suddenly snapped at him.

"Be quiet! Mac, the professor has a bite—snake, I think. Found him keeled over. Go and look in that little house across the way. See what devil's work this degenerate has been carrying on here. Then come back and I'll shoot him."

MacDonald obeyed, striding past the two men.

Fournier regarded the shrinking, misshapen half-breed with implacable eyes. Explanations were not needed. He perceived how this creature had preyed upon the superstitions of the Pijul natives, how he had held them in a bondage of fear and horror.

"How do you cross that gulf in the earth?" he demanded suddenly.

"*Señor*, I—there is a place not very deep," stammered the wretched creature. "I have a ladder pegged there to each side. The Indians do not know it. Mercy, *señor!* I did not know you were white men—I will give you gold——"

"Empty that sack," ordered Fournier.

Juan Barella obeyed, eager to placate the eyes of iron. From the sack poured forth all manner of objects—little bundles of cacao leaves, chased ornaments of virgin gold, tinned foods, bundles of brilliant feathers, strange weapons; a motley assortment. Seizing several small skin bags, the half-breed shoved them forward.

"Gold, *señores!* Have mercy! I will show you where it is. I will show you where the ancient men worked their gold, where their *arrastres* and molinettes can still be used—"

"We don't want your gold," said Fournier briefly.

Mac stood at his elbow, breathing heavily, wiping sweat from his brow. The sun was slowly heaving up into sight.

"Losh, what an awfu' thing!" breathed Mac hoarsely. "Puir woman! I wull no' forget——"

Fournier lifted his rifle. At this instant, the half-breed flung himself to his knees,

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hands outstretched. His terrified eyes found the figure of Jenks. He realized that his hope of life hung by a hair.

"*Señores*—wait!" His voice was shrill, terrible to hear. "There is a way out through the jungle—a trail to the Hispania! I alone know it—I will show you! And I will carry this sick *señor* on my back. I can do it. I put a line around my head, and carry him easily. I can carry two of you, *señores!* Have mercy, and I will——"

Fournier stood motionless. The rifle lowered by degrees. In the silence, the hot breaths of the half-breed came distinctly to the two men.

"Mac, we couldn't hope to clear any part of this city without a force of men. We've no food. This devil offers us salvation. I hate to leave him to return and work his will again in this place, but—what's your vote?"

"Same as yours," said Mac promptly.

Fournier nodded. A thin smile curved his lips.

"After all," he said reflectively, "there is nothing like knowing when to show mercy! And even justice has its price. Let's pack up."

CHAPTER IX

HAIR OF THE DOG

A WEEK later, Fournier and MacDonald sat one night in talk, outside a wretched hut in a wretched village near the juncture of the Hispania and Canaloza Rivers.

Johnny Long had carried out his agreement, and Jenks now reposed within the hut—ill but recovering. The half-breed had departed. Before the three comrades now remained only the comparatively easy trip to real civilization. But it was not of this civilization that Fournier and Mac were talking under the stars.

"Are ye dead sure of it, now?" queried Mac.

"Yes. I could almost follow that trail back blindfolded. I even left signs that I could pick up again if necessary." Fournier smiled thinly. "But why go back?"

"Gold," came the rumbling whisper. "Man, d'ye no' mind how he spoke of *arrastres* and such?"

Fournier grunted.

"If I wanted gold, I'd have stayed. The night after we started, I scared the insides out of that devil, Mac. Never told you about it—but I did. He opened up. Said there were hairy men in those hills up above the silent city—oh, he gave me a lot of dope. The brute is only half a man himself, and believes it all."

"Well," and Mac sighed, "if he'll no' go back——"

A noise behind them. The two men turned quickly. There in the doorway of the hut stood Jenks, haggard but with the same flame in his deep eyes.

"You two fools!" he said, and smiled. "I heard you. I suppose you didn't examine these gold ornaments you took away from that fellow, and gave me?"

"Not particularly," said Fournier. "Thought you'd like 'em, professor. That's all. Why, weren't they real gold?"

"Real—gold? Good lord, man! They're real Aztec!" cried Jenks. "If we could throw a crew of men into that city and clear it, we'd make discoveries that would wake up the scientific world! Think of it——"

"You go back to bed," cut in Fournier abruptly. "You're to stay in bed one solid week, so start in right now. No more talk."

"But you said you could return there!" protested Jenks anxiously.

"If we wanted to, yes. But we don't want gold."

"Will you guide me back?" demanded Jenks. "No, don't try and make me lie down—answer me! Will you take me back there?"

Fournier looked at MacDonald whimsically.

"I expected it!" he observed. "Will we, Mac?"

"I'm no' saying we will," answered MacDonald, and grinned. "But I'm no' saying we won't, d'ye mind! Go you to bed, my mannie."

Apparently satisfied with this, Jenks disappeared. The two partners looked at each other, a slow smile in their eyes.

"Hair of the dog that bit!" said Fournier.

"Oh, aye!" said Mac gravely. "Oh, aye!"

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A LITTLE FURTHER

by Berton Braley

THE reason I never can quit the road
Is a reason that's plain and clear.
It's because no matter where I may stop
And whether it's far or near
There's a place beyond the place I am,
Wherever I may be at,
And then beyond is a place beyond
And the world beyond all that!

And as long as a man has eyes to see
And a brain that wants to know,
I figure there's things he's bound to miss
If he doesn't go on and go;
For there's always a place beyond the place
I happen to hang my hat,
And another place beyond that place
And the world beyond all that!

There's some folks stay in a single spot
Or a town of which they're fond,
And never worry a little bit
At the thought of a place beyond;
But the place beyond the place beyond
Won't never let me rest
For there's a sort of a kind of urge
That's burnin' within my breast—

To go an' go till the end of life,
An' when I've left *it* flat,
Go on beyond the place beyond;
And the universe after that!

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THE PASSING OF JOHN RINGOLD

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "Cochise," "The Showdown," etc.

NOTE—As you know, we seldom break our habit of printing fiction stories only: You prefer fiction on the whole, and in our magazine's field it is particularly difficult to insure an article's being absolutely true to fact. Occasionally we have ventured an exception, without at all abandoning the rule. We do so in the case of this series of articles on prominent figures in the development of the West, believing that the author's standing is sufficient guarantee of trueness to essential fact and that your long displayed interest in our country's early history is sufficient warrant.—A. S. H.

THERE were all kinds of bad men in the days of the Old West. John Ringold was one sort and Frank Leslie was another. While this tale deals mostly with the former, still it concerns the two of them and when the last word is said perhaps the facts will show as good a picture of Leslie as they will of Ringold.

In its wild youth the town of Tombstone knew both men. To this day the Old-Timers who witnessed the swift march of events during the years 1879, 1880 and 1881 will tell you of their deeds. But things were happening fast when those deeds took place. There was, if one may be allowed to use a poetic figure, a good deal of powder-smoke floating in the air to obscure the vision. And so, although no men were ever more just in passing judgment than these same Old-Timers, the story has its sardonic ending.

John Ringold was the big he wolf among the outlaws, a man of quick intelligence who did not seem to care much whether he or the other fellow died. To him who wants the ornate trappings of the motion-picture bad man or the dialect which make some desperadoes popular in fiction, Ringold would prove a disappointing figure as he showed up in southeastern Arizona.

For he wore no hair chaps, nor do those who saw him tell of a knotted colored handkerchief about his throat. Like most of those riders who drifted into the territory when other portions of the West had grown too hot for them, his costume was unobtrusive: light-colored jean breeches tucked into his boot tops, a flannel shirt and the gray Stetson peculiar to the country west of the Pecos—a limp-brimmed hat with a high crown which may be creased after the old "Southern-Gentleman" fashion but is most often left with such dents as come by accident. Of hardware he carried his full share; sometimes two forty-five revolvers and a Winchester; but if he were in town the arms were as likely as not concealed.

It would take a second look to separate him from the herd. That second look would show you a fine, lean form whose every movement was catlike in its grace, a dark face whose expression was usually

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sullen, whose eyes were nearly always somber; slender hands and small feet. And his speech, whenever you heard it, was sure to be comparatively free from the idioms of the region; the English was often more correct than otherwise. A man of parts, and he looked it; they all say that.

This was John Ringold; he had been over on the Pecos when the outlaws were having everything their own way there. Before that period a certain California city had known him as the reckless son of a decent family.

And in passing note the fact that he still got letters from his people after he came to Tombstone with a price on his head from back in Texas. Which helps to explain that somber demeanor, the whisky which he drank—and the ending of his life's story.

Frank Leslie fulfils the requirements of some traditions much better when it comes to externals. He wore many buckskin fringes on his shirt and breeches; his hair hung to his shoulders and his sombrero was bedecked with much silver. His weapons were always in evidence; a pair of silver-mounted revolvers were the most noticeable among them.

Because he called himself a scout some men used the term in speaking of him. He did not ride with the outlaws, although he often vanished from Tombstone for considerable periods; in town he was always to be found in some gambling-house or dance-hall.

Of women there were many who fancied him. And he could shoot to kill—from in front if the occasion demanded it; from behind if the opportunity was given him. A handsome fellow, and he had a persuasive way with him.

Whisky got the best of him in his later years, but that was after the period with which this narrative has to deal; and when he drank, it was not because of any brooding. The past held no regrets for him; thus far he had managed to handle every situation to his own satisfaction.

These are the two men; and, as for Tombstone, it was booming. The mines were paying tremendously; business was brisk twenty-four hours a day. An era of claim-jumping, faro-playing, dance-halls, the Bird-Cage Opera-House, Apache scares, stage holdups; and, of course, gun-fighting.

The Earps virtually ran the town government; they enforced the local laws against shooting up the place and so forth very much after the manner of Dodge City; and they were strong, resolute men. Frank Leslie was on good terms with their henchmen; he was, if the statements of the Old-Timers are to be believed, anxious to remain in the good graces of these stern rulers.

John Ringold, on the other hand, was at outs with them; and soon after their advent into power he drifted away from Tombstone along with the other outlaws. To use the expression of the times, he was "short" in the mining-town, which means that when he came there he had to be ready at all times to defend his life and liberty.

AND now that you have seen the men and the town, the tale can go on; it is a mere recital of certain incidents which took place during the last year or two of John Ringold's life, incidents which show the difference between his breed of bad man and the breed to which Frank Leslie belonged. To the chronicler these incidents appeal for that very reason. The days of the Old West strike one as being very much like the days of old knighthood; they were rude days when some men tried hard to live up to a code of chivalry and some men made themselves mighty by very foul means indeed. And, while we may not always be sure that the names which have come down to us—from either of these wild eras—are those that should have been coupled with fame, still we can be certain of one thing—the chivalry existed in both periods.

According to the code in the Middle Ages the challenge and the single combat were recognized institutions; and they say that knights-errant used to go riding through the country seeking worthy opponents. And according to the cowboy code in southeastern Arizona during the early eighties among the outlaws, a champion must be ready to try conclusions in very much that same way on occasion.

It was one of those traditions which some men observed and some—wisely—ignored. This desperado John Ringold was among those who observed it; and one day, like poor old *Don Quixote*, he found himself trying to force conclusions with men whose ideas were more modern than his own,

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which led him—like Cervantes' lean hero—into a bad predicament and also brought him to a strange friendship.

The Earp brothers and their followers, as has been said, were ruling Tombstone, and the outlaws had fled into the country east of the Dragoon Mountains. But the outlaws did not fancy remaining out in the open country; sometimes they came back to town in force and hung about the place for days; always they were hoping to return permanently. And always the Earps were looking to drive them out of the county for good and all.

Eventually the thing climaxed in the great Earp-Clanton gun-fight, and there was a long period when this battle was brewing. During this period, whenever they came to town, the desperadoes used to put up at the Grand Central Hotel; and Bob Hatch's saloon, where the Earp boys and their friends were accustomed to take their "morning's morning," was directly across the street. Things came to a pass where the noon hour would often find a group of outlaws on the sidewalk before the hotel and a number of the Earp faction in front of the saloon, both outfits heavily armed, the members of each glowering across the street at those of the other.

Now Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday and others of the law-and-order party had come here with big reputations from Dodge City, where they had taken part in more than one affair when the lead was flying. They had sustained those reputations by their deeds in Tombstone; they were champions—"he wolves." And so, one noontime when he was standing on the sidewalk among his fellow outlaws, John Ringold was seized with an idea.

He looked across the street at the members of the Earp party, who were regarding the desperadoes in ominous silence. The idea grew more powerful, until it owned him. He stepped down from the sidewalk's edge into the roadway, crossed it and came to a halt within a few feet of his enemies. Addressing Wyatt Earp by name—so goes the story—

"This sort of thing," John Ringold said, "has been going on for a long time now. Pretty soon there's bound to be a big killing if it keeps up. Now I've got a proposition. You, or Doc Holliday, if you'd rather have him, step into the street here with me, and the two of us will shoot it out. I give my word, my gang will stand by the result."

Wyatt Earp made no answer. What temptation that offer held to him one can judge only by the fact that he was a bold man who had a pretty long record of large deeds to his credit. But also he was the recognized head of a movement for law and order, a movement which had already stopped indiscriminate street-shooting in Tombstone; just at this time he was being groomed in certain quarters as a candidate for sheriff, and the banner of his party was emblazoned with the word Reform.

It is easy enough to see how John Ringold was away behind the times when he made that proposition on Tombstone's main street. It is easy also to imagine his feelings when without a word by way of answer or acknowledgment the members of the Earp faction stood regarding him. He turned his back upon them and he recrossed the street, and when he had gained the opposite sidewalk they were gone within Bob Hatch's saloon.

Johnny Behan was sheriff then, politically an enemy of the Earps and politically friendly to the outlaws. He was sitting in his office with young William Breckenbridge, his diplomatic deputy, when some one brought word that John Ringold had made a gun-play and was holding down the main street with drawn revolvers.

"Go and fetch him in," the sheriff bade Breckenbridge.

The latter found the outlaw pacing up and down before the Grand Central Hotel after the fashion of the cowboy who has shot up a saloon and driven all hands out of the place. The two had met some months before when the deputy was out in the eastern part of the county collecting taxes with Curly Bill as his guide and protector.

"What's up?" the youthful officer demanded, and John Ringold recited his version of the affair.

"Well," the other told him when he had finished, "the sheriff wants to see you."

The desperado shrugged his shoulders, but went along quietly enough; bail was easy to arrange in those days, and this was not a serious matter.

In his office Johnny Behan heard the tale and frowned. There were times when his outlaw and cowboy constituents became

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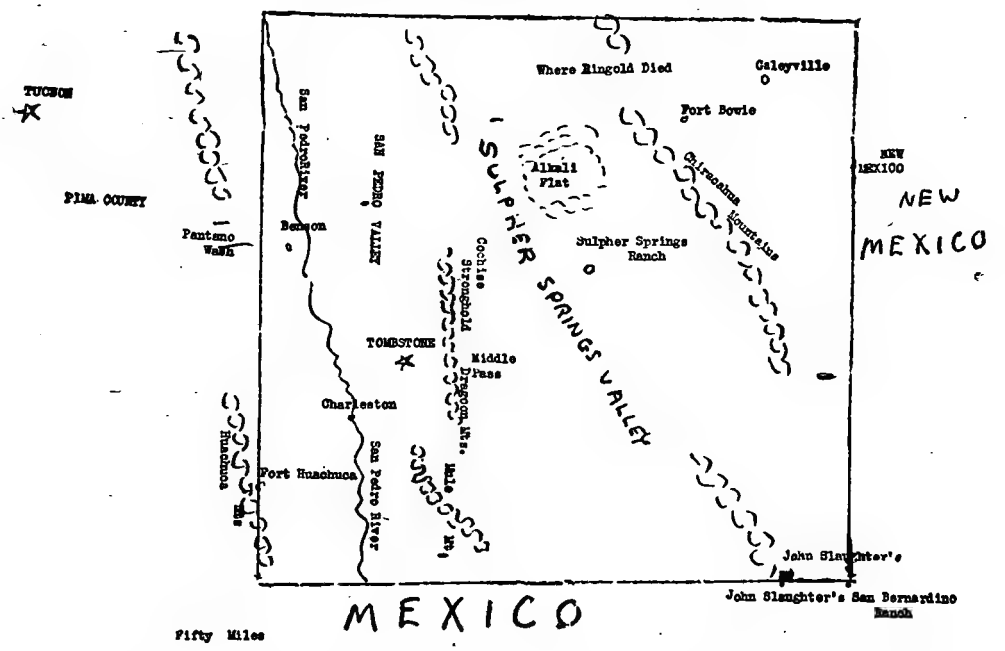

COCHISE COUNTY, WHICH IS AT THE EXTREME SOUTHEAST CORNER OF ARIZONA, SHOWING THE PRINCIPAL POINTS AND LANDMARKS IN THE EARLY EIGHTIES. THE SCALE IS TWENTY-FIVE MILES TO THE INCH. IT WILL BE NOTED THAT TOWNS AND LOCALITIES WHICH ARE TOLD OF IN EARLIER ARTICLES BY MR. BECHDOLT APPEAR IN THIS SECTION.

a source of embarrassment to him; this was one of them.

"Guess you'll have to turn over those guns of yours," he bade the prisoner.

Ringold handed the revolvers to him, and he put them into a desk drawer. There followed several moments of awkward silence. At length Johnny Behan arose and started to leave the room.

"Going to lock me up?" Ringold asked. "I'd like to fix it to get bail, you know."

"No charge against you," the sheriff said in the doorway. "You can go back downtown whenever you want to."

With which he passed out into the corridor and forgot all about the matter. In the office Ringold stood scowling at the deputy.

"That's plain murder," he said at length. "Before I get a block away from here without my guns those coyotes will kill me."

Breckenbridge had been doing some thinking on his own account during the last few moments, and he realized the justice of this argument. But the law was the law, and the sheriff was boss. It was not his business to interfere. He looked Ringold in the eyes, got up from his chair, opened the desk drawer—and left the room. And when he came back the guns and their owner had departed.

In itself the incident wasn't much to talk about. In those times all sorts of things were being done according to different standards from those which rule now. But it brought its consequences.

THE days went by. In Tombstone politics seethed; the law-and-order party was making things hot for Johnny Behan, whose sympathies with the cowboys gave him the support of the desperadoes, a support which in its turn brought the accusation that he was extending leniency to wanted men.

Over in the Sulphur Springs Valley and the San Simon John Ringold nursed his grudge against the sheriff for having disarmed him when his guns were so sorely needed; he cherished that unpleasant memory while he directed the movements of Curly Bill and their followers, while he rode forth from Galeyville with them to raid the herds of border cowmen, or to ambush

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bands of Mexican smugglers, or rob the stages.

And so gradually it became known among his fellows that their leader held a grievance against the sheriff, that he was biding his opportunity to play even with Johnny Behan for that blundering piece of thoughtlessness. John Ringold was the biggest man among them all, the brains of the whole crowd; they waited to see in what manner he would settle the score. And finally the time came when he got his chance.

A man who rejoiced in the name of Kettle-Belly Johnson was the indirect means of bringing about this opportunity. He enters the story on a blistering afternoon in the little town of Galeyville.

It has been told in another of these tales how Galeyville was the bad men's metropolis, headquarters for all the rustlers and stage robbers of Cochise County; how the place enjoyed a brisk prosperity through the enterprise of a wide-awake citizen who had established a cattle-buying business—and no questions asked. On the afternoon in question John Ringold was the only outlaw in the place; his followers were absent on some wild errand or other, and he was putting in the time at a poker-game.

There were four men seated around the table in the dingy barroom, silent as four owls, mirthless as high priests at a sacred rite. Observing the full ceremonials which dignify draw poker, they let the chips and cards do all the talking—and made signs when they chose to pass.

It has been said that John Ringold's face was sullen and his eyes were somber; the depth of his unpleasant expression had grown this afternoon as the shabbiness of his luck increased. Or was it luck?

He sat, of course, facing the door, and Kettle-Belly Johnson occupied the opposite chair. On the two others, one of whom was flanking John Ringold on either side, there is no need to waste words; they belonged to the same breed as the poetically rechristened Johnson, the breed that got its name from shaking dice against Mexicans out of tin horns.

It was no more than natural that the desperado should ask himself whether he was right in blaming fortune for the cards which he drew. There came a new deal and time to draw again.

"Two," John Ringold muttered.

Kettle-Belly Johnson held up a single finger; and when he had gotten his card, performed one of those prestidigital feats by which he made his living. And when this was accomplished—with the aid of a device known as a "holdout"—his moist, plump fingers clutched a full house—jacks on kings. The betting went briskly to the bitter end.

John Ringold scowled down on the hand which beat his; pushed back his chair, fumbled briefly at his vest and laid his gold watch on the table.

"Lend me a hundred," he growled. "She's worth a hundred and fifty." But Kettle-Belly Johnson shook his head.

"Easy come," said he, "easy go. Get out and rustle some more cows or hold up the stage again. We ain't a-runnin' no pawnshop."

John Ringold left the room without more words, and the three tinhorns fell to cutting for low spade to while away the time. They had been at it just as long as it would take a man to go down to the corral, saddle his pony and bring the animal up in front of the building, when the outlaw reentered. His single-action Colt's forty-five revolver was in his right hand; its muzzle regarded the trio at the table like a dark, baleful eye.

The bearer of the weapon uttered a single word, a word which is not found in any dictionary although it has come down from the time when the first Englishman took to the highway to seek his daily meat.

"Hanzup!"

They obeyed and the ensuing silence was broken by the pleasant chink of money as John Ringold's left hand raked the winnings into his pocket. There was no pursuit as he rode away down Galeyville's main street; but he spurred his pony hard, for self-righteousness was boiling within him and he had to find relief some way.

"—— bunch of robbers!" he told the horse.

Ordinarily the incident would have closed right then and there; but Fate so willed it that Kettle-Belly Johnson came to Tombstone a few days later and voiced his plaint in Bob Hatch's saloon, where he found himself suddenly surrounded by sympathizers. He did not know—and if he had he would not have cared one way or the other—that the new law-and-order party had grown to a point where it wanted to get action in

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the courts; that its members were looking for an opportunity to swear out a warrant against some of the bigger outlaws in order to "show up" Johnny Behan, who—so men said—was unwilling to arrest any of the cowboy faction. The grand jury was in session; they got Kettle-Belly Johnson sober enough to face star-chamber inquisition and led him to the court-house in the morning.

SO IT came that young Billy Breckenbridge, whose business was serving warrants and not bothering over the whys and wherefores of their issuance, knocked at the door of John Ringold's cabin in Galeyville a few days later; and then, being a prudent man, stepped to one side where he would be beyond the zone of fire.

"Got a warrant for you," he announced when the desperado had demanded to know who was there. "Highway robbery."

There was a bit of parleying through the closed door and finally—

"Man by the name of Johnson is the complaining witness," young Breckenbridge elucidated. "According to what I hear, the play came up along of a poker-game."

John Ringold swore lightly.

"Come in," he bade the deputy. "I'll get my clothes on in a minute."

He laughed sourly as he was pulling on his boots some moments later.

"Looks as if the grand jury's hard up for something to do," he observed.

He rose and belted on his gun, a proceeding about which his custodian, being unburdened with any desire to burn powder over such hair-splitting technicalities as a man's right to wear weapons on his way to jail, made no comment.

"We'll go down the street," the prisoner suggested as they were leaving the cabin, "and I'll fix it up to get bail."

But the accommodating cattle-buyer who arranged such matters for the bigger outlaws was out of town and would not be back until evening. Breckenbridge's horse was jaded, and if he wanted to reach Tombstone in good time he should be setting forth at once.

"You go ahead," John Ringold bade him. "I'll catch up with you before you pass Sulphur Springs ranch."

Those were queer days, and if you go to judging things from our twentieth-century standpoint you will probably find yourself bewildered.

This man John Ringold was known to be a cattle-rustler, stage-robber and—according to the law—a murderer. And Breckenbridge, whose duty it was to enforce the statutes, set out for the county seat alone on the strength of that promise. Nor was he in the least surprized when his prisoner, who had ridden all night to make good his word, overtook him in the middle of the valley.

Queer days indeed! And the threads of some men's lives were sadly tangled. Such desperadoes as Curly Bill were easy enough to read; just rough-and-tumble cowboys who had taken to whisky and bad company. But behind the somber mask of John Ringold's face there lurked a hidden history; something was there which he did not chose to reveal to the rest of the world.

The mail had come to Galeyville after young Breckenbridge left. There is nothing more conducive to confidences than a long ride through a lonely country. And when these two were jogging across the wide, arid reaches of the Sulphur Springs Valley the outlaw pulled a letter from his pocket; the envelope was already broken; evidently he had read its contents before; now he scanned them for a long time and his dark face was set. He thrust the paper back into its enclosure; then suddenly, as one who yields to impulse, reined his pony closer to his companion and held forth the envelope for him to read.

"Look at that writing," he said quietly.

The hand was unmistakably that of a woman of education.

"My sister," he added and shoved the letter into his pocket.

They rode some distance in silence and then—

"And I'm here," John Ringold added in the same even voice. "She writes me regularly. Thinks I'm doing fine!"

He did not bring up the subject again; it was as if he had opened a curtain a little way and let it fall at once; but the deputy, who came from good people himself, had been able to see much during that brief glimpse into the outlaw's hidden life. And having seen those tangled threads he was able to understand and interpret to his own satisfaction certain matters all the better when the end came.

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NOW while Deputy Sheriff Breckenbridge and John Ringold were riding toward Tombstome things were brewing in that wild young mining-camp. The law-and-order party was preparing to make a clean-up of the desperadoes.

And when the pair arrived the news went forth: the hour was late, but late hours meant little in those days of all-night gambling; a number of the leaders gathered in Bob Hatch's saloon and discussed the situation. It looked promising, for Ringold was the brains of the bad-men; with him in custody it should be easy to lay hands on Curly Bill, who was at the time over in the lawless town of Charleston on the San Pedro. They made their plans toward that end; and, just to make doubly sure, they arranged matters with the district attorney to see that Ringold was kept in jail for at least twenty-four hours.

That was the situation when the pair arrived from No Man's Land; there was no chance for getting bail at this time of night; the outlaw slept behind the bars; and when the morning came he sent for the lawyer who was always retained by the stock-rustlers, a criminal attorney by the name of Goodrich.

Goodrich brought news that the law-and-order party were preparing for an expedition to Charleston to round up Curly Bill. Knowing the habits of his burly aide, John Ringold was reasonably sure that the crusaders would find the latter the worse for whisky and bring him back a captive. His natural itching to depart from custody was aggravated by the feeling that his presence in the cow-town by the San Pedro was badly needed. He urged Goodrich to hurry to the bank and get the bail-money.

The conference took place in Johnny Behan's office, and after the lawyer's departure on this errand the outlaw remained there pacing the floor. Half an hour passed; a man had brought Ringold's pony from the O. K. corral and left it at the hitching-rack before the court-house. Everything was in readiness—excepting the cash. Finally Goodrich returned.

"All right," he told the sheriff, who was seated at his desk. "I've got the bail here, 'ohnny. Everything's arranged."

And Johnny Behan, who was, if the truth be owned, a very easy-going peace officer indeed, bade his prisoner depart. He did not know—and Goodrich did not know—that on this occasion the bailing out of John Ringold was going to be something more than a mere formality.

So it came about that a number of people met with surprizes this same morning. Included in these were a delegation from the law-and-order party who rode over to Charleston to gather in Curly Bill but got no further than the approach to the bridge which spanned the San Pedro River. A solitary figure at the other end of the structure made them draw rein. John Ringold's voice reached them from across the stream.

"Come on," he called. "I'm waiting for you."

Something had gone wrong, and when something goes wrong the wise general does well to investigate before continuing his advance. The posse deliberated briefly—and then turned back for Tombstone. But their astonishment at finding the leader of the desperadoes at large was as nothing compared to Johnny Behan's bewilderment when he met the district judge in the court-house corridor some time near noon.

"I'll be ready to take up the matter of that man Ringold's bail in a few minutes," Judge Stilwell said pleasantly.

The sheriff remained inarticulate for several seconds. Finally—

"Ringold!" he managed to gasp. "Why, he's gone. I thought——"

Perfervid language followed. Johnny Behan had been a cowboy in his time, and the court had—in his unofficial capacity—a pretty large vocabulary of his own. In the end certain facts began to outline themselves through the sulfuric haze: the district attorney had offered objections to the proffered bail; Goodrich was up-stairs at this moment awaiting a hearing.

"I'll take this matter up," the judge told the stricken sheriff, "tomorrow morning, and I'll hold you responsible for the appearance of the defendant in court at that time."

The news flew fast, and when the posse returned from Charleston they found the town of Tombstone discussing Johnny Behan's predicament. Being wise politicians, the leaders of the law-and-order party kept to themselves the information as to John Ringold's whereabouts. That evening they called a meeting of their followers, and a second posse set forth through the darkness for Charleston.

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There were some fifty-odd of them, well armed and enthusiastic. Their purpose was to bring the outlaw to the court-house the next morning. Thereby the reform movement should gain much prestige—and the sheriff lose standing.

But Charleston was full of stock-rustlers and bad-men that night, and when the members of the law-and-order party rode into the place they found themselves surrounded by a half a hundred of the worst men in the Territory of Arizona. John Ringold had been looking for further trouble, and his forces were so well disposed that the invaders had their choice between surrender and being massacred.

They yielded to necessity like wise men and gave over their arms to their captors, who forthwith took them to the nearest saloon and bought them many drinks. It was during this portion of the proceedings that Curly Bill, who had led the ambushing-party, learned whom the prisoners were seeking. He brought the news to John Ringold.

"So it's me they're after," the outlaw said.

"And it looks," said Curly Bill, "like Johnny Behan is in a mighty tight box, the way things has turned out."

Knowing the grudge which his friend held against the sheriff, he was not surprized to see John Ringold's face grow darker and the light in his eyes more devilish.

"I tell you what," the latter bade him after some moments of thinking. "You keep those fellows here to-night. Don't let one of them leave Charleston."

And Curly Bill departed to see that the command was obeyed. They say that the celebration which attended the holding of the captives was one of the large events in the tumultuous history of the cow-town by the San Pedro, and those who witnessed it are unanimous in stating that the Tombstone contingent upheld the reputation of their camp when it came to whisky-drinking. It was late the next day before the last of them rode back through the foothills of the Mule Mountains to their homes. But all of this is apart from the story.

The point is that John Ringold, who had not forgotten the day when the sheriff was willing to let him go unarmed among his enemies, lived up to that code of cowboy chivalry which holds the obligations of friendship deeper than all others, even those of hate. That very night he saddled up and journeyed to Tombstone, where he sought out young Billy Breckenbridge.

"Heard there was some trouble about my being turned loose," he announced when he had roused the deputy from his slumbers, "and I didn't know but what maybe you'd lose your job if Johnny Behan got turned out of office."

Wherefore it came about that when court convened in the morning and the matter of John Ringold's bail was brought up the prisoner was produced to the utter astonishment of all concerned—excepting himself and the man who had allowed him to recover his confiscated revolvers.

RIGHT then and there the skirmish ended. The law-and-order party had never hoped to hold the leader of the outlaws in jail longer than a day or two, and their plans to seize Curly Bill during his incarceration were shattered now; they had furthermore failed to "show up" Sheriff Behan.

Within the hour John Ringold walked out of the court-house under bonds to insure his appearance at the trial. And no one expected the case to come to anything. In short, the situation was unchanged, and the head men of the reform movement settled down to bide their opportunity of killing off the bigger desperadoes, which was apparantly the only way of settling the issue.

So John Ringold went his way, a marked man, and many a trigger finger itched when he appeared in Tombstone; many a bold spirit longed to take a shot at him. But the knowledge of his deadliness kept him from being made a target.

He went his way, and it was a bad way. Dark deeds piled up to fill the debit pages of his life's ledger.

If those letters, which came regularly to remind him of gentle womanhood disgraced by his wild career, influenced him it was only to make him drink harder. And the more he drank the blacker his mood became. Those who rode with him have said so. A bad man, there is no doubt about it; and big in his badness, which made it all the worse.

There came a blazing day in the late Summer, one of those days when the Arizona sun flays the wide, arid valleys without surcease, when the naked rock on the mountain heights is cloaked in trembling

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heat-waves and the rattlesnakes seek the darkest crevices among the cliffs. Deputy Sheriff Breckenbridge, on his way back to Tombstone from some errand in the eastern end of the county, was riding through Middle Pass in the Dragoons.

As he came forth against the flaring skyline at the summit he saw a rider coming toward him from the west. He turned to one side where the lay of the land gave him a vantage-point, loosened his revolver in its holster and awaited the traveler's closer approach.

Some moments passed; the pony drew nearer, and the deputy withdrew the hand which was resting on his weapon's butt. His face relaxed.

"Hello there, John," he called, and John Ringold rode up to him in silence. "Hot day," Breckenbridge announced cheerfully.

The desperado swore at the sun in the drawling monotone in which your artist at profanity intones his curses when he means them. His face was a good shade darker than usual; his eyes were satanic. He reached to his hip and brought forth a flask of whisky.

"Have a drink." He uttered it rather as a demand than an offer.

The deputy took the bottle and made pretense of swallowing some of the lukewarm liquor. The outlaw laughed sourly, snatched the flask from him and drained it.

"Got another quart," he announced as he flung the empty receptacle against a boulder.

"Better hit it mighty light," Breckenbridge advised. "The sun's bad when you get down there to the valley."

He waved his hand toward the wide flat lands which lay shimmering like an enormous lake a thousand feet below them. John Ringold raised his somber face toward the blazing heavens and launched another volley of curses upon them before he rode away. And that was the last time young Breckenbridge saw him.

The thing which took place afterward no man beheld save John Ringold, and his lips were sealed for all time when others came upon him. But the desert holds tracks well, and the men of southeastern Arizona were able to read trails as you or I would read plain print. So they picked the details of that final chapter from the hot sands of the Sulphur Springs Valley as they are set down here.

Morning was drawing on toward noon when John Ringold's pony bore him downward from the living granite pinnacles to the glaring plain. Noon was passing as he jogged onward across the Sulphur Springs Valley.

To this day, when ranchers have drawn floods of limpid water from the bowels of the earth, the place sees long periods whose heat is punishing. At that time the whole land was a desert; a flat floor, patched in spots by alkali deposits, girded round by steep-walled mountain ranges. Cactus grew there, and huge tufts of Spanish bayonet.

John Ringold's pony jogged on and on; the fine dust rose from its hoofs, surrounding animal and rider like a moving wraith of fog, settling down upon their sweating skins in a whitish-gray film which stung like fire. Before them the mirage wavered like an enormous, vague tapestry stirring in a breeze.

But of breeze there was none, nor was there any sign of water save that fantom of a lake—dead now for ages—which kept its distance always ahead. And the sun climbed higher; its scourgings grew ever fiercer.

Scourged also by thoughts and memories which he had never revealed to men—save only as he had hinted at them on that other afternoon to Breckenbridge—the bad man drank the lukewarm whisky as he rode. And the liquor did its work until, when he had gone two hours from the foot of the pass, he realized that it was overcoming him.

He drew rein, dismounted, and sought the shade of a clump of soto-bushes. But before he flung himself upon the baking sands he took off his boots and, tying their tops together, hung them over his saddle-horn. The pony he turned loose with the reins down, cowboy fashion. After which he yielded to the whisky and knew no more.

THE sun was still glaring in the cloudless sky when he came back to his senses; and the torture of that thirst which comes after heavy drinking was upon him. He got to his feet. The pony had gone. Afterward the searchers tracked the animal to the Sulphur Springs Ranch, where it had come with the boots hanging to the saddle-horn.

John Ringold was alone, a speck in the middle of the shimmering plain, and there

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was no water for miles. He started walking eastward toward the pass which leads over into the San Simon. The cactus did its work; the alkali sands scalded his bleeding feet; he took off his shirt, tore it into strips and bound them round his ankles for footgear; and when the strips were cut through he used his undershirt. Until finally he walked barefooted and the blood-drops showed beside his tracks.

Toward the end the same blindness which comes to thirst-maddened cattle seized upon him. When they found him he was within a stone's throw of water and the sound of the stream must have been in his ears, for his footprints showed where he had circled and zigzagged, striving to reach the spot whence that limpid murmuring came. Among the cartridges in his belt were two whose lead was deeply dented by his teeth as he chewed upon them in the vain hope of moistening his lips.

He was seated on a boulder between two dwarf liveoaks and his big forty-five revolver lay beside him, with one empty shell. The bullet-hole was fairly between his eyes, all powder-marked.

And so they knew just how he died; and young Billy Breckenbridge, who came over into No Man's Land a day or two later, was able to piece out the story by back-tracking along that trail through the sands; able to read those signs from the foot of the Dragoons on across the valley; and able also—because he had seen that letter—to realize the torture of memories which had come along with the torture of thirst to goad John Ringold on to self-destruction.

In this manner it came about that the outlaws of Cochise county lost their leader; and, now that the man of brains was gone, it became possible for events to shape up as they did soon afterward—toward the big Earp-Clanton gun-fight.

The Old-Timers are unanimous in saying that had John Ringold been alive that battle wherein the leaders of the Earp faction slew several of the biggest desperadoes would never have taken place as it did; the forces would have been differently disposed than they were on that bloody morning when Billy Clanton and the MacLowery boys died in Tombstone's street by the O. K. corral; the chances are the victory would have gone the other way. To this day they tell how Ringold's passing was the beginning of the end; how Curly Bill vanished soon afterward; how the stage-robbers and rustlers became disorganized and were no longer any match for the law-and-order faction.

And when the Old-Timers, who witnessed these wild doings, recount the history of the windup, laying the cause as has been stated, they give the credit to the man whom they believe entitled to it; which brings us back to Frank Leslie.

On that blazing day when John Ringold rode out into No Man's Land, Frank Leslie was away from Tombstone. And this time there were more urgent reasons for his departure from the camp than the mere seeking after plunder. He was, as has been said, a bad man. A bad man of the type who can kill from in front but relishes best that opportunity which offers the back of the other man as a target.

During the long period while the outlaws were swaggering down Tombstone's streets, defying the leaders of the law-and-order movement, the long-haired two-gun man managed to cling to the good graces of the Earp faction, just as in these days you may have seen a crooked ward heeler hanging to the skirts of a good-government crusade. Nobody loved him, but there were those who thought he might be useful; he traded on their names and—when there was dirty business to be done, as there always has been since politics began—he was there to do it. Also he was right there to ask favors in return.

So it came that the knowledge of his killings spread abroad; men told how he had slain one victim who was drinking in a dance-hall when the bullet entered his back; how another had fallen, shot from behind in a dark alley. But prosecutions never followed, and the buckskin-clad figure with its long hair and bad, handsome face became a sinister object in Tombstone's streets.

However, a man can not keep up this sort of thing forever without getting an ill name, and the time came when Frank Leslie was beginning to be a source of embarrassment to those who had thus far tolerated him. On top of which his prestige was suddenly threatened.

There was, in the camp, a fellow by the name of Nigger Jim, one of those black negroes whose blood is undiluted by the white man's; a former slave; more than

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six feet tall and—to this very day—as straight as a ramrod. He had fought Apaches and on more than one occasion held his own against outlaws; and the early settlers, of whom he was one, treated him as an equal.

This Nigger Jim had staked a silver claim over Contention way, and one day Frank Leslie jumped the property. The owner heard that the bad man had put up new location notices in place of his own and hastened to the place to investigate. He found Leslie camped on the ground, well armed and ready to maintain possession. What followed does not amount to much when it comes to action with which to adorn a tale.

Nigger Jim walked up to the bad man, his hand on his revolver-butt. The luck which sometimes looks out for the righteous party in a quarrel was with him to the extent of seeing to it that the meeting took place out in the open where there was no chance for ambush.

The break was even. And the black man was determined to see the issue right through, willing to abide by whatever consequences might follow. Moreover he had earned his reputation with a six-shooter. So, as has been said, he came walking up to Frank Leslie—from in front.

And Frank Leslie allowed him to approach until the two stood facing each other out there among the rocks and Spanish bayonet. Then the two-gun man spoke, holding forth his right hand.

"I heard some parties were jumping your claim, Jim," said he, "and, being near, I thought I'd come over and look out for you."

"Thanky," said Nigger Jim, but made no offer to take the extended hand; nor did he turn his back upon the bad-man, who evidently did not think the claim worth the hazards of an honest gun-fight, for he left soon afterward.

IN TOMBSTONE Nigger Jim kept silent regarding the incident, but the news leaked out within a week or two when Leslie tried to slay the black man from behind and was prevented by a woman who threw her arms over him and held him until the prospective victim turned his head and took in the situation. With the spread of the story Frank Leslie saw that Tombstone was no place for him at present and he left the camp. Whereby it happened that he was over in the San Simon on that hot day when John Ringold came across the Dragoon Mountains. And on the morning when the body was discovered he was riding through the pass on some dubious errand or other.

News traveled slowly in those days. Frequently it came to its destination sadly garbled. On this occasion young Billy Breckenbridge was the only man who brought the facts back to Tombstone; and he arrived there long after Frank Leslie.

For the two-gun man had seen his opportunity to make men forget that incident wherein he had figured so poorly against Nigger Jim, and had spurred his pony all the way to the county seat, where he told his story—how he had seen the desperado sitting under the dwarf liveoaks, had stalked him as a man stalks big game and shot him through the head. And just to give his tale verisimilitude he said he had done the killing from behind.

The times were brisk; one shooting came so fast on the heels of its predecessor that every affair in its turn swiftly passed from public attention. By the time that Deputy Sheriff Breckenbridge arrived with the facts people were turing their minds to the big Benson stage holdup. And so Frank Leslie's story lived, and to this day in speaking of that bad man the Old-Timers give him grudging credit for having slain the big he wolf, John Ringold.

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THE REVENGE OF MALACHI DODDRICK

by W TOWNEND

Author of "Barbed Wire," "The Other Side," etc.

EVEN on board a tramp steamer, where men on long voyages get to know the most intimate details of each others' lives and the gossip is as the gossip of a small village, there may be secrets.

The chief engineer and the second engineer of the *White Lilac* were, so far as outward appearances went, friends, and yet if the rumors concerning them were true they should have been enemies.

No two men could have been more unlike. Andrew MacKavie, the chief, was big and broad in the shoulder and inclined to take life easily. His good nature was colossal, so were his conceit and his pride in himself and his talents and achievements. Malachi Doddrick, the second engineer, was small and thin and narrow chested, an ugly little man with a weak little black mustache and a pointed nose and narrow green eyes that looked anywhere but at the person to whom he happened to be speaking, and he had a laugh that seemed always to be hiding a sneer or a snarl or both.

People were apt to wonder why the chief wasted his time on a miserable little rat like Malachi: still more were they apt to wonder why Malachi could even tolerate the man who had robbed him of his happiness.

In its main outlines the story was not a secret. Every one on board the *White Lilac* knew that two days before what should have been Malachi's wedding-day, his girl had married Andrew. But no one knew what events had led to the tragedy—the tragedy being Malachi's of course—not even Johnny Gillowan, the third engineer, who came into contact with the chief and the second more than any one else on board.

Johnny said that he thought the only reason why Malachi had not packed his bag and left the *White Lilac* at once was that while he was shipmates with Andrew he could still feel that he was in touch with Ellen. Johnny was interested in Andrew and Malachi just as any normally minded young man would be interested in any two men as different from each other as they were. He had theories of his own which he never mentioned, not even to Prott, the fourth.

He would laugh if he were asked had Malachi forgiven the chief. Malachi was not the sort of man who forgives anything.

Did the chief understand Malachi's real character? Johnny was puzzled. On the voyage that followed the chief's marriage Malachi was as friendly with him as ever he had been in the past: he flattered him outrageously, he laughed at his jokes, he talked of him as a prince among men—to his face, at least—and on shore at the various ports they touched he trotted around after him like a little dog, paid for his drinks—when the chief permitted—and helped him on board when his legs refused to carry him, as happened more often than was seemly for a man who was newly married.

But Johnny knew that Malachi would get even with Andrew sooner or later.

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NEARLY seven months went by before the *White Lilac* reached the Channel once more, bound for the Thames with a general cargo from New York. Even before the Ambrose Channel Light had been passed the chief had begun to make plans for meeting his wife. He spent most of his spare time asking other men's advice: how long would it take Ellen to travel to London from her home in Liverpool? what route should she take? If the ship reached port early in the morning and he sent a wire at once, when would she be at the dockside?

He wondered if she were well, how she would be dressed when they met, whether she had had all his letters, and so on. He had only one topic of conservation at meal times, his wife. And to everything he said about her Malachi would listen with an air of the greatest interest and attention.

The fourth engineer asked Johnny Gillowan if he thought that the second was quite right in his head. It didn't seem hardly decent, he said, for a man whose girl had married some one else to keep asking questions about her and wanting to hear how she was getting on. And Johnny Gillowan agreed. But he was curious to know what Andrew MacKavie's wife would say or do if she met Malachi.

His curiosity was soon satisfied.

Ellen had been waiting in London for the *White Lilac* to arrive. When she came aboard Johnny was on deck talking to Malachi, who broke off the conversation suddenly.

"My ——!" he said. "Look!"

It was then that Johnny saw Ellen walking up the gang-plank, steadying herself against the hand-rail.

Malachi hurried toward her, rubbing his greasy, dirty hands on a piece of oily waste.

"Hullo, Ellen!" he said and his smile took away something of the ugliness and meanness that was in his face. "How are you!"

But Ellen, showing no embarrassment, gave him a kind of off-hand nod and without seeming to see his outstretched hand stepped off the gang-plank on to the rusty iron deck plates of the *White Lilac*.

"Is Andrew on board?" she asked, glancing around, as though Malachi were beneath her notice.

And then the chief came running along the deck, and she uttered a little cry and went to meet him.

Malachi's face was a pasty white, almost the color of putty.

Not until Andrew had taken his wife into his berth did Malachi speak.

"Did you see that?" he said turning to Johnny. "Did you—did you—you did, eh? You saw—" He spoke in quick, uneven jerks. "My ——! she'll be sorry—she will. Treats me like dirt, she does—like dirt——"

He dropped on to a hatch and sat all huddled up with his arms folded and his chin on his chest. When the chief and his wife appeared on deck once more, ready to go on shore, he jumped to his feet.

"Ellen," he said, "why wouldn't yer speak to me just now, eh? What's wrong?"

The girl flushed a bright pink and gave him another cool little nod, and her husband laughed loudly, like an overgown boy.

After that a dull hate seemed to smolder in Malachi's green eyes whenever he had cause to speak to Andrew or look at him or, as Johnny used to say, think of him. But Andrew never noticed. Or he gave no sign of noticing, at least. Or of caring, anyhow. Perhaps, though, he was merely taking a risk. Johnny Gillowan and Prott had come to the conclusion that MacKavie would risk anything except his engines. Prott was of the opinion that Andrew in his heart set a slightly higher value on his engines than on his wife. But Prott came from Swansea and was prejudiced against Scotch chief engineers.

Johnny went so far as to agree with Prott, however, that Mac was a queer case. He should have known better than to make fun of Malachi and laugh at him, especially in Ellen's company. But again, supposing that the report that hinted that Malachi had been going to marry Ellen was no more than a lie! What then?

FOUR months after leaving Cardiff the *White Lilac* reached Capetown where letters were waiting. There were half-a-dozen for the chief in his wife's handwriting. He grinned happily and went to his own room. Later he appeared on deck, his red face lit up by a kind of wild excitement.

Malachi and Johnny Gillowan and Prott were seated in the sun, smoking and talking.

"Have you had good news, chief?" said Malachi.

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"Aye, the vera best that a man cud ha'e fra his wife—she says in this letter she's expectin'——"

He looked at the three men on the bunker hatch and it almost seemed as though there were tears in his eyes.

"I was hopin'," he said, "that I'd hear—an' noo——"

He broke off with a little smile.

"I don't understand what you're drivin' at," said Malachi fretfully.

Prott chuckled.

"You wouldn't—of course! Why should yer?"

He nodded at Andrew.

"When you've been married as long as what I 'ave, chief, you'll be less excited by what's honly—in a manner o' speakin'—nature. I've three now—three: two boys an' a girl."

He sucked at his pipe.

"Not that I'd part with one of 'em, of course."

"Ah!" said the chief. "But it's the first wean that means everything——"

Malachi rose to his feet and walked off, his hands in the pockets of his dungarees.

Late that night as Johnny Gillowan was leaning on the rails amidships, watching the lights of the city and the stars and listening to the soft lap of the water alongside, Malachi came and stood by his side.

"Haven't you been ashore?" asked Johnny presently.

"Yes," said Malachi. "Yes, I 'ave, by ——! I've been ashore with Mac. I've put him in his bunk now—tanked. The poor, soft fool! He talked! Gillowan, 'e never stopped talkin' once—not from the time we left the ship till we come aboard! An' talkin' what of—what do yer think he talked of—an' to me—to me, —— 'im!"

Malachi was smiling in such a savage, vicious way that Johnny was startled.

"What's wrong?" he said.

Malachi rested his arms on the rail and began to talk.

" 'E's happy. Right! Let 'im enjoy his ruddy happiness while he may. He may laugh—him an' Ellen—but let them wait! He may steal what's mine, but he'll pay. 'Is punishment's comin', sure as Fate! I'll 'umble his ruddy pride. I'll show 'im he ain't the Lord Gord Awmighty! not like 'e thinks 'e is. He's 'appy. Because 'e's got hopes. Right! I'll give 'im 'opes. I'll put the fear o' Gord into his mis'rable soul! 'E'll be sorry some day——"

And then Johnny took him by the back of his collar and shook him.

"What are you talkin' like that for?" he said. "You say another word like that an' second engineer or not, it's you that 'ull be sorry, not the chief!"

Malachi looked at Johnny as if they were strangers who had met for the first time.

"What's troublin' yer?" he said.

"You know. Why are you threat'nin' the chief?"

"Threat'nin'! Who—do yer mean Andrew?"

"Listen here, Mr. Doddrick, do you like the chief—or don't you?"

"Like him!" said Malachi with a little angry yelp. "Like 'im! A man what stole my girl away from me. By ——! I 'ate 'im! I 'ate him like no man ever 'ated another before."

"Why do you stay on the ship, then?" asked Johnny.

"Why!" said Malachi. "Why!" He seemed doubtful how to reply. "I dunno, Johnny—I dunno." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "I'm not near as soft as I look, mebbe. What did I say? Some day the chief will be sorry—well, 'e will. That's all. I think I'll be turnin' in, Mr. Gillowan—we're likely to have a hard day tomorrer. Good-night, Mr. Gillowan, an'—an' 'appy dreams—as 'appy as if you was expectin' to hear that *your* wife was expectin' to be a mother—only you ain't married, Mr. Gillowan—an' no more am I—quite a co-incidence, as yer might say, ain't it?"

Malachi shuffled off, then, leaving Johnny staring after him in the darkness.

Next day Johnny, though ignorant still of the rights and the wrongs of the case, went to the chief's berth and told him to be on his guard against Malachi.

The chief who was seated at his table in his shirt sleeves, writing a letter, burst into a shout of laughter.

"Dod!" he said scornfully. "That wee rat!"

He stood up and crossed the room to a cupboard.

"Plannin' tae get even, is he? I've heard tell o' queer things afore, but never yin sae queer as that!"

He came back to the table with a bottle and two tumblers.

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"Mr. Gillowan, wull ye ha'e a gless in honor o' Mr. Doddrick's plan?"

Johnny had his drink. Then he continued once more.

"Well, chief, you may laugh. But I'm only tellin' you to look out, that's all!"

"Malachi's thinkin' he's got a grudge agin' me, is he?"

"Seems that way," said Johnny.

The chief nodded.

"Weel, he has not, then. Malachi's a weak-kneed little leear, but a guid engineer. Aye, Malachi kens his wark a' richt, I'll say that fur him. But he tell't ye he's gaun tae get even wi' me, did he? A-weel! I'm no' afeart fur Malachi: no, nor fufty Malachis. Dae ye think I dinna ken what like a man he is! Mebbe he thinks Ellen shud ha'e mirrit him. She promised tae be his wife, I'm no' denyin' it—afore she met me! But was she tae mairry Malachi efter that an' be unhappy fur life? It was me she cared fur—not Malachi. She never cared fur him at a'. What's mair, she tell't him sae! An' Malachi's gaun aroon' lettin' fowks imagine he's got a grievance! Weel, weel! A' richt! Ellen chose me o' her ain free wull an' she's happy the noo, which is mair nor she'd ever ha'e been wi' him. Malachi may say what he likes, I'm no worryin' ma heid aboot him!"

"I thought I'd warn you," said Johnny uneasily.

"I'm muckle obleeged tae ye. Malachi talks an' that's as faur as he gets. If he stairts ony monkey business wi' me, Mr. Gillowan, I'll brak his ugly wee neck fur him!"

NOT even Johnny's warning, however, made the chief engineer more cautious. He seemed to take a delight in talking to Malachi, or in Malachi's hearing, of his wife and his hopes for the future. No man could have been more pleased with himself than Andrew MacKavie. He had the finest little wife in the world: he would have the finest bairn: there was no other chief engineer afloat who could prevent the engines of the *White Lilac* from falling to pieces, let alone keep them in running order.

He was, in fact, deserving of all the good that life could offer him. At meals in the mess-room he talked incessantly, apparently not caring whether any one else spoke or not: so long as he had a listener he was contented. And as the voyage dragged on its tedious length Malachi grew more and more wretched and miserable and the hate in his eyes deepened.

At Bombay the day before the *White Lilac* sailed for home, a letter came for the chief from his wife. What he read seemed to crush all the spirit out of him. When Malachi asked how things were getting on at home, he said simply that Ellen was very ill.

Prott said that if Ellen was really ill, he was sorry for Andrew. He knew what a wife's illness meant when the husband was at sea.

Malachi grinned, but said nothing by way of comment. He was comparatively cheerful the whole way to Port Said where the chief found another letter waiting for him. This time the news was better.

Ellen wrote that she was feeling stronger —the chief was so much relieved in his mind that he read most of the letter aloud in the mess-room at tea—but what was keeping her up and giving her strength was the hope of seeing him. She was so lonely, all by herself. But to know for certain, as she did know now, that her husband would be back within a few weeks had taken a load off her heart. She was better already and so happy. She was even getting the house cleaned so that everything would be looking nice when he returned.

"She ought to be careful," said Prott. "I know. She ain't 'ad the experience that my missus 'as 'ad, chief. She didn't ought to tire herself out!"

"Is that a fac'?" said the chief anxiously. "Weel, my mither is wi' her. She'll see that she comes to nae hairm, I've nae doot!"

Later he invited the fourth engineer into his berth to have a confidential talk and to gather the fruits of his observation as the father of a family.

"Like a couple of cacklin' old midwives!" said Malachi. "Ain't they?"

Johnny Gillowan did not answer. Malachi's opinions on other people were worthless. He noticed, though, that as they drew nearer the Channel, Malachi became even more gloomy than he had been. He seemed to be brooding. He had no appetite, he spoke no oftener than was necessary, he looked like a man who fears that the worst will happen, also he began to avoid Andrew.

The *White Lilac* was favored by fair weather all the way home. Not even a

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headwind and a choppy sea in the Bay reduced the rate of speed below a steady nine knots an hour. The chief was almost beside himself by the time that the Ushant light was abeam.

"Did ye ever ken the auld engines tae rin mair smooth nor they are the noo? Lusten, will ye? Jist as sweet an' as easy as though they was new oot the shops at Dumbarton."

He held up his finger and listened with his head on one side and a smile on his lips.

"I declare tae ye, there's engines o' twicet the horse poo'er o' thon that's no' capable o' hauf the wark. Though, mind ye, I'm no' sayin' but what they dinna need nursin'. It's only the care that they ha'e that keeps them taegither. Wi' ony ither firm but this they'd ha'e been on the scrap heap or sell't tae the Germans afore the last survey. They was in an awfu' way when I tuk them ower, jist fa'in' tae pieces—an' noo—last time we was hame the sup'rintendent ses tae me, he ses: 'Mac, them engines o' yours is guid fur anither ten years!'"

Malachi smothered a yawn. Johnny grinned to himself and asked the mess-room lad for more tea.

WHEN the *White Lilac* reached the Thames there was a telegram for Andrew from his mother. Ellen was seriously ill, would he come at once?

"Poor devil!" said Prott when he heard. "When my second was born, Johnny, I went through just such a time as the chief."

Two days later the chief was back once more, rather more quiet and subdued in his manner than any one had ever yet seen him, but hopeful.

"She's a wee thing better," he said in answer to questions. "Aye, she's rale better. I wudna ha'e come back sae soon if she hadna been."

"He's sufferin'," said Malachi in the engine-room later on. "An' he'll suffer more still."

His face was dirty and damp with drops of sweat; a lock of greasy black hair was plastered across his forehead under the peak of his cap, his narrow eyes gleamed with a kind of angry fire, and in his hand he held a big monkey-wrench which he swung to and fro viciously.

"Yes, he'll suffer still more," he said. "An' he'll know, Andrew will, what I suffered when he did what he'd no right to do!"

"And what was that?" asked Johnny, wondering what Malachi would say.

"He stole my girl same as I told yer. Stole my girl an' he's bein' punished. You wait, Johnny——"

"Don't talk so daft! He didn't steal your girl, Malachi, an' you know it. She chose him, of her own free will."

"What's that!" said Malachi. "What's that you say?"

He raised the monkey-wrench almost as if he were about to hit.

"Drop it, Malachi!" said Johnny. "Sharp!"

Malachi laughed uneasily.

"I didn't mean nothin', Johnny. I wasn't goin' to touch yer. O' course I wasn't. But, Johnny, listen, I'm speakin' the truth. Andrew stole my girl, an' 'e's payin' for what 'e done . . . one way or another, 'e's payin'!"

"But —— it!" said Johnny, "do you mean to say you're pleased because that poor girl of his is sufferin'——"

"She's nothin' to me," said Malachi dully. "Not now she ain't. Once, I daresay, but not now, Johnny—not now. Andrew's sufferin', whether she is or not—thank Gord! What's more 'e'll suffer more yet. Wait till we reach Liverpool, Johnny—wait till then an' you'll see the word of the Awmighty fulfilled—vengeance is mine an'——"

"Oh! get to —— out of it!" said Johnny.

And after that he was more than ever certain that Malachi was crazy.

AT LIVERPOOL after the usual crop of rumors had been weeded out and found to be false the Captain brought word that the *White Lilac* was chartered for the Rio Plate and that the ship would clear just as soon as ever the owners could get the cargo on board.

The engineers were kept busy in the engine-room the whole time they were in port. Malachi seemed to take it as a personal slight that the chief was away from the ship so much.

"Look at us!" he said savagely. "Workin' like ruddy slaves we are, an' the chief not 'ere to 'elp us!"

"Well," said Prott, "he ain't boozin' or enjoyin' hisself, is he? You don't grudge him bein' with his wife, do you, an' 'er time

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comin' so near—surely to God you got more decency than that, Mr. Doddrick!"

And then there followed an argument ending in Prott losing his temper and sulking and Malachi being highly amused.

Andrew MacKavie said very little—in the mess-room, at least—about what was happening at home. But Mrs. Ladrock, the wife of the mate, a neighbor, told her husband that the doctor had said she was growing weaker. All Andrew's light-heartedness and buoyancy and pride had gone. He had aged ten years since they had left Bombay.

As a rule he was particular about his appearance, even at sea. Now, he did not seem to care. He had even given up shaving. He said he had no time. And there was a kind of haunting dread in his eyes, an intentness, as if he were always on the watch for the news that might come at any moment.

And then one morning he came into the engine-room, looking tired and worn out and ill.

"It's a lassie," he said quietly, without any enthusiasm.

"Good, chief!" said Johnny, "that's fine."

But he wondered why Andrew showed no signs of being easier in his mind.

"Chief," said Prott, "I'm right glad to 'ear it. Girls are best. How's everything?"

"No' vera guid," he said. "I dinna ken what's wrang—the doctor wudna tell me—but I doot she's sinkin'. I maun gang awa hame agin. Whaur's Mr. Doddrick? He maun dae wi'oot me this morn'. I'm ower worrit tae wark!"

At dinner-time on the day following Malachi stopped the chief just as he was going on shore and asked after Ellen.

They stood talking on the bridge deck just outside Johnny Gillowan's berth. Johnny was washing and whether he wished it or not was forced to hear what was said.

"Chief," began Malachi, "how's Mrs. MacKavie?"

"Malachi," said the chief, "she's bad—vera bad——"

"Ah!" There was a depth of sympathy in Malachi's voice that would have deceived any one on board, perhaps, but Johnny. "Dear, dear! Chief, I'm sorry——"

"Aye, I kent that, Malachi, thenk ye!"

"It's hard on you, chief."

"Aye. it's haurd—an' the ship likely tae leave port tomorra—I dinna ken what i' the worrul' I shall dae—gaun awa an' Ellen sick——"

"If she's strong enough—as soon as she's feelin' better, chief, will you tell her how sorry I am she's been ill——"

"Malachi, I wull."

Johnny heard the sound of footsteps departing and pushed open the door of his room. Malachi turned swiftly and though Johnny felt that a moment before he had been smiling his expression was coldly hostile and inquisitive.

"Ah, my young friend—so you've been list'nin'!"

"How the devil could I help list'nin'?"

"My expressions of sympathy—were they satisfact'ry?"

"They were —— lies, if that's what you mean!"

Malachi shook his head in a kind of make-believe sorrow; but Johnny felt that the other hated him only a little less than he hated Andrew MacKavie and Ellen.

It was four bells in the afternoon watch when the chief returned. He went to the engine-room at once.

"Malachi," he said, "here. I want tae speak tae ye——"

They stood at the foot of the ladder talking.

"Wants me!" said Malachi all at once in a shrill voice.

"Aye—she tell't me she wantit tae speak til ye—I'll be vera gratfu', Malachi, if ye'll come!"

"Grateful!" said Malachi in sudden anger. "Grateful! You! You don't care for me, chief, why should I care for you? Or your wife, either. She's nothin' to me—nothin'!"

He seemed to be choking.

"I won't come," he said. "I can't."

The chief caught hold of his arm. Malachi yelped.

"You're hurtin'!"

"I dinna ken what fur Ellen wishes tae speak wi' ye, but she ses she maun see ye—afore we gang tae sea. Ye're comin' wi' me up tae the hoose—y'unnerstaun'!"

"I tell you," said Malachi, "I won't come."

"Ye wull come," said Andrew. "If ye don't, I'll——"

He did not finish.

"I'll come," said Malachi.

"We've nae time tae waste," said the chief.

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He clambered up the ladder and Malachi followed, looking like a man in a dream.

"What's it all mean, Johnny?" said Prott after a time. "You know them better than any one else does. What's in the wind?"

"Darned if I know!" said Johnny. "The chief said this mornin' that his wife was bad. I heard him. Why should she send for Malachi——"

"Surely to Heaven she doesn't like him!"

"She hates him."

"I wonder," said Prott, "what was the truth of that story about 'er promisin' to marry Malachi before Andrew got 'er! Don't seem possible, does it?"

Andrew told Johnny Gillowan and Prott the next day that his wife had said she must see Malachi alone, just for a minute, and the doctor had said that she must have her own way. When the door opened again and Malachi came out, he looked like a man who has received a blow from which he would never recover. He left the house without saying a word.

It was dark before he arrived back on board.

Johnny who had promised to meet the second and third mates on shore for a final drink was on deck when Malachi staggered up the gang-plank.

"Is that you, Mr. Doddrick?" he asked.

"It's me," Malachi said. "My ——, yes; it's me! Who did yer think it was? A ruddy angel, eh! Wassermatt' wi' you—you——"

Then Johnny saw that he was drunk. He must have fallen as there was mud on his clothes, and he had lost his cap and his forehead was bleeding.

"Are you hurt?"

"Hurt, —— you! Hurt!" Malachi's voice rose to a shout. "Hurt! I'm pretty near dead—dead—an' she's dyin'! D'yer hear! I've seen her—talked to her, you ruddy lunatic! She said she was sorry—d'yer hear?—sorry she'd treated me so bad. But she didn't care for me—she never had—it's him that she loves, that great soft husband of hers! An' you, you're laughin', —— you!"

All at once he lurched forward and aimed a blow with his fist, round arm, at Johnny's head, missed and fell forward limply on to the deck.

Johnny thrust his hands into his pockets and looked at him.

The night watchman came slouching along from the direction of the galley.

"You take his feet, Smith," said Johnny, "I'll take his head."

"Let me be!" groaned Malachi as they lifted him up. "Let me be, for the love of ——!"

They carried him into his berth and laid him in his bunk and left him there, with his arms folded over his face, muttering and moaning. And his mood was not the result of drink only, Johnny knew, being an expert.

ANDREW came on board the next morning, looking as though he had not been able to sleep for worry. His face was pale and haggard, deep lines showed between his nostrils and the corners of his lips, his eyes were bloodshot. He seemed uncertain of himself and slurred his words when he spoke.

Johnny guessed that things were worse. Andrew was suffering and he was sorry. He could see Malachi watching him, casting sidelong glances in his direction, as if trying to read his innermost thoughts from his looks.

Soon after the chief entered the engine-room, Malachi sidled up to him.

"How is she, chief?" he asked.

"She's jist aboot the sam'," he said. "Nae better an' nae waur—yit. Whiles she's easier an' then agin she's in torment. I dinna ken, Malachi, hoo she can staun muckle mair o't. If I was stayin', she'd no' worry hersel'. It's the thocht o' me gaun tae sea that's wearyin' her. Aye, she wants me sair, an' I maun gang aff wi' the ship. I'd stop hame if I cud, but I canna—God kens!"

"An' she wants yer!" said Malachi.

"Aye, she wants me."

"An' she's ill!"

"Aye, vera ill—they'll be sayin' prayers fur her i' the kirk the morn's morn'."

He stood for a moment staring at the brightly polished cranks, then he gave a hard laugh.

"The day's comin', maybe, when the Board o' Trade wull ha'e a' ships fitted wi' wireless, but that's no' yit! Fra' the time we pit oot tae sea the nicht till we reach port, I'll no' hear hoo ma wife is daein'! Aye, whatever happens, I'll no' hear o't——"

He turned and climbed the ladder.

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Malachi smiled.

"What are you smilin' for, Malachi?" said Johnny.

Malachi glanced at him quickly.

"You mind yer own ruddy business, an' I'll mind mine——"

"Right!" said Johnny. "Only you let me see you grin like that, Malachi, an' I'll show you what business mine is. Understand! You said enough when we were in the Thames. You're glad, an' you can't hide it! But let me tell you this, you'd better try."

Malachi retorted with the same words that Johnny had used to him.

"Oh! get to —— out of it!" he said.

But for the remainder of the morning he was very quiet and to all appearance subdued.

About a quarter of an hour before the *White Lilac* was due to leave port Johnny Gillowan went on deck to have a last look at Liverpool. The day was bright and sunny; the Blue Peter at the masthead was flapping in the breeze, the steam was roaring from the exhausts, the deck hands were fastening down the tarpaulin on the last of the hatches to be loaded, the boatswain and the carpenter were making the booms fast in their cradles.

Near the bridge the pilot was talking to the captain and his wife, who looked sideways over her shoulder, scornfully it seemed, at Mrs. Ladrock, the wife of the mate, who was crying openly and unpleasantly on her husband's neck.

A trimmer who had been missing since dinner-time came scrambling up the gang-plank, much the worse for liquor, and as he reached the deck supported himself against a stanchion and began shouting farewells to a lady friend, equally the worse for liquor, on shore.

Mrs. Prott, with one small child in her arms and two others clinging to her skirts, was saying good-by to Prott at the door of his berth. Prott was taking his departure badly. Johnny knew that he would be miserable for the best part of a week and then, suddenly, would throw off his grief in an amazing way and put Mrs. Prott out of his mind until they received orders for home. Then he would be sentimental once more and vow never to touch whisky again as long as he lived.

A small boy ran up the gang-plank.

"Hi, mister!" he said to Johnny, "I've a message fer the chief engineer, Mister MacKavie——"

The chief came out of his room.

"Chief," said Johnny, "there's a message for you——"

The small boy handed Andrew a letter. When he had finished reading he gave a kind of groan.

"There's nae answer," he said in a thick choking voice. "Nae answer at 'a'. No—say I canna manage it. Ye unnerstaun'—I canna manage what they ask. An' here, ma mannie—" He groped in his pockets and produced a six-penny bit. "Here, tak' this fur yer trouble an'—an' thenk ye——"

When the small boy had gone he turned to Johnny.

"Ma ——!" he said. "Didna they ken I'm no ma ain maister! It's fair killin' me, Gillowan, an' I can dae naethin'."

"Are things worse?" asked Johnny.

"Aye, Ellen's waur an' she keeps askin' fur me. Her mither says in the letter that if I cud come hame, mebbe, she'd be easy. What can I do? Naethin'. Dae they think that the chief engineer can stay at hame when he wants tae? Jist on accoont o' his wife bein' ill! There's nae consideration fur wives when ye're at sea—nane at a'——"

He moved away in the direction of the alley-way that led to his berth, stumbling a little, as if he could not see, his shoulders bowed, his head bent, and paying no heed to the captain's wife who said something to him as he passed her.

Johnny looked after him in pity.

"So she's worse, is she?"

He turned swiftly and saw Malachi standing at the door leading to the engine-room gratings.

"If you heard," he said, "you know. You're happy, aren't you? You've got your revenge without havin' to work for it, you beauty! You smile—just once—and I'll smash your ugly face in for yer!"

Johnny waited, rather startled by his own outburst. Malachi cut up some tobacco in the palm of his hand and did not speak. He seemed to be considering not so much what Johnny had said, but events generally. "Well," said Johnny, "got anything to say? The chief's breakin' his heart because of his wife an' you're just as pleased as if some one had given you a million pounds!"

Malachi nodded his head.

"Talk away, Johnny. I'm second engineer

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on board this packet an' you're third—but say what yer ruddy well like! Don't mind me, of course! But I'm thinkin' you'd best save yer breath an' get down to the engine-room."

And then his manner changed suddenly.

"Listen, you fool! If that great soft puppy loved his wife as she ought to be loved—do you think he'd allow his job to stand in the way of bein' with 'er! ——, no! If Ellen said she wanted him with her, whether the ship was due to leave port or not, he should have gone. That's where his place is—with her, not in the ruddy engine-room! To —— with the job when yer wife needs yer!"

He climbed down the ladder and Johnny followed him.

AS A rule when Andrew MacKavie came into the engine-room just before the start of another voyage he would be smiling and laughing and talking as if the thought of seeing his engines in motion once more had been the greatest pleasure in life. But now as he waited for word from the bridge he leaned against the iron pillar of the telegraph with his hands in his pockets and a look of agony in his face.

"Another v'yge," he said. "Anither lang, mis'rable v'yage! Four or five months mebbe afore we're back hame agin—mebbe mair! God help us!"

Malachi grunted.

"If he's lookin' to Gord to help 'im, 'e ain't got much ruddy 'ope, 'as 'e?"

"If you go on talkin' like that Mr. Ruddy Doddrick," said Johnny in a whisper, "you won't have much ruddy hope, neither!"

Just then the telegraph rang and the chief turned the handle in answer: *Stand-by.* A moment afterward came *Slow Ahead*—and the cranks began to move and the *White Lilac* set off on another voyage.

Presently when they were out of the dock into the river, the chief said he would go to his own room. His head was aching so that he could scarcely see or think. He went up the ladder slowly, as though very tired.

For a time Johnny watched the second engineer, whose watch it was, going his rounds, feeling the parts, patting the cranks as they swung round and round in and out of the crank-pits and making a hissing noise with his mouth for all the world like a stableman grooming a horse.

"Ruddy lot o' scrap iron these ruddy engines," he said, "ain't they?"

Johnny nodded.

"Wouldn't be surprized ever if they fell to pieces—would you?" Malachi grinned. "Break the chief's 'eart, wouldn't it?"

Something in his manner caused Johnny to look at him sharply. They were alone in the engine-room. He was not afraid of Malachi, but it flashed into his mind that he was going crazy—his eyes looked so strange—and he was smiling in a sneering, wicked way that might have meant mischief—and Malachi was capable of mischief, he knew.

"Johnny," he said all at once, "listen—'ear that!"

Johnny listened and heard the regular, steady beat of the cranks, still going half-speed, and the noise of a shovel in the stoke-hole.

"Listen to what——"

Malachi broke into a jeering laugh and put his hand on Johnny's shoulder and held him.

"Call yerself a ruddy engineer!" he said. "You—what do you know about engines! Nothin', Johnny—nothin'. An' what are yer doin' 'ere—spyin' on me again, eh! What's yer ruddy game? Come on—what are yer playin' at? You'd better go to yer berth, Johnny, my lad, an' 'ave a lie down—in yer little bunk! You'll need it—need it bad! There's 'ard work in front o' you, Johnny —— 'ard, back-breakin' sour work! What did the chief say—four months—five months! Gord! five months before 'e sees 'is wife again—what about that, Johnny—five ruddy months before he sees Ellen!"

Malachi thrust his pale face forward and showed his yellow teeth that looked like fangs under his drooping little black mustache. Johnny, who had been watching him intently, waiting for what might happen, too amazed even to shake off his hand that still held him, found his attention wandering. Was the beat of the engines slowing down or not? He listened, but Malachi's sharp, rasping voice made hearing difficult.

"—— the chief!" he was saying. "Why ain't 'e with her now—an' —— you, too. You always sided with 'im, didn't yer? I was nothin'—you—you mis'rable toad—what are yer lookin' like that for? Think you've 'eard something, do yer? Something wrong! Well, you ain't, then!

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You're no ruddy engineer—you—keep still or I'll croak yer—ah! you would, would yer!"

All at once Johnny sprang forward.

"What've you done to the engines?" he yelled. "My ——, Malachi!"

He tried to push Malachi away from him. But Malachi, shouting with laughter, slipped one arm around his neck and before he could free himself from his grasp began to batter at his face with his big oil-can.

"—— you!" he snarled. "Stay where you are—it's too late!" He brought the oil-can down hard on his forehead. "It's too late——"

Johnny, half-blinded by oil and blood, drove his fist into his ribs, but Malachi still clung to him, and again the oil-can crashed down on his face, and they rolled over on to the platform, fighting and scuffling and hitting and swearing, and everything went black in front of Johnny's eyes and he was conscious of Malachi's hot breath in his face and the blows of the heavy oil-can and the noise of feet clattering down the ladder and the chief engineer's loud and angry voice and all the time the horrible noise of the cranks jarring and grinding and turning more slowly and more slowly. . . .

One of the firemen dragged Malachi away.

"What the ——'s wrang in here?" shouted the chief.

He rushed at the stop-valve and shut off the engines. Then he rang the telegraph and turned to where Malachi was leaning against the bulkhead, breathing hard and holding his head in his hands.

"Mr. Doddrick," he said, "what ha'e ye been daein'——"

Malachi gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"Look at my jaw!" he said. "He hit me. Comes down 'ere, —— him, on my watch an' starts hittin' me——"

"You liar!" said Johnny.

"Haud yer tongues, the twa o' ye!" said the chief.

Johnny was too shaken to argue. He did not move for a minute or so, but sat where he had fallen in a kind of daze, wiping the blood and oil from his face with a sweat rag, while the chief went from one bearing to another, taking off the grease caps and uttering little choking sobs at what he saw, with Prott and the donkeyman following him, and the firemen came in from the stoke-hole and the telegraph bell kept ringing and Malachi leaned against the bulkhead, holding his head and grinning wickedly, like an ape.

And then Johnny heard the second mate's voice.

"The captain wants to know, chief, what's happened?"

The chief broke into a kind of scream.

"The main bearin's, tell him. Everything's gaun tae ——. White metal in the bushes, meltin', like milk, an' the shaft—it's no Bessemer steel, it is, but white saft pine, scored deep—ye ken what I mean—look fer yersel'——"

"But when will we get under way again—" began the second mate.

"Don't come into ma engine-room askin' —— foolish questions!" roared the chief. "Hoo the —— dae I ken that! If I hadna shut aff the engines when I did they'd ha'e been scrap by this time——"

The second mate vanished up the ladder. Johnny rose to his feet shakily and advanced toward Malachi who gave way before him, scowling.

The chief, who had reached the thrust bearings, straightened his back.

"Mr. Doddrick," he said, "wha was the man done this?"

"Done what?" said Malachi.

"Ruined ma shaft, ye foo'! What dae ye think I'm talkin' aboot!" He pointed his finger at him. "You, Mr. Doddrick, what were ye daein'? What fur did ye no' examine the bearin's?"

"Me!" said Malachi. "I was just comin' round to them. There was no 'urry, was there, chief? If Mr. Gillowan chooses to start scrappin' down here how the —— can I do my work? An' how was I to know the metal was goin' to get 'ot an' run like it did, eh?"

"Ma ——, man!" said the chief, "you dudna suppose that the metal fused an' rin of its ain accord, did ye? The bearin's —— ye!—the bearin's are chokit wi' brass filin's!"

"——!" said Malachi, opening his eyes very wide. "Brass filin's! Who would put brass filin's into the bearin's?"

The chief looked wildly around the engine-room.

"Ma shaft's gaun, an' ma reputation's gaun, an' ma chance o' promotion's gaun! I dinna ken wha did it, but —— help him if I get ma twa haun's on him——"

"Well," said Malachi, "it wasn't me, so I'm not worryin'. But ——"

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He paused and Johnny noticed the malice in his eyes.

"But what are you grumblin' for, eh? You ought to be thankful you can go ashore to your wife instead of bein' at sea an' not knowin' for weeks what's happened——"

Andrew stared at him as if he didn't believe what he had heard, and then the captain shouted down from the gratings.

"Mr. MacKavie, are you all crazy down there—why the devil don't you come an' report what's wrong—come up here at once!"

"Vera guid, sir," said Andrew.

As he put his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder he turned to Johnny.

"Mr. Gillowan, gang ye tae yer ain room an' wash that blood an' oil off yer face. I'll attend tae ye later on. I'm no' gaun tae excuse fechtin' in ma engine-room. Mr. Doddrick, ye'll stay here till I return. Mr. Prott, clear them —— swines o' firemen oot the engine-room."

He ran up the ladder swiftly.

Johnny spoke to Malachi over his shoulder.

"Mr. Doddrick, mebbe you think you've scored—you haven't! I'll knock your head off your shoulders just as soon as ever I get the chance——"

"No, you won't, Johnny," said Malachi slowly. "Don't you make no mistake about that—you won't."

"We'll see," said Johnny.

THE *White Lilac* was towed back to dock. As soon as he could get away after the ship was made fast, Andrew MacKavie went home at a trot, in his engine-room clothes and bareheaded. There would be an inquiry into the cause of the damage, of course, but in the meantime his wife might be dying. There was no reason why he should stay on board.

It was evening and though the summer sky was still red from the sunset the lights were shining on shore.

Johnny watched the chief making his way along the dockside, when he turned he saw Malachi.

"Look here, Mr. Doddrick," he said, "I gave my word to the chief I'd not touch you—not yet, anyway—so clear out!"

"Right," said Malachi. "I don't want a ruddy scrap, neither. I just want to tell yer this——"

"I don't want to talk to you. I know too much about you—you —— liar!"

Malachi did not seem in the least put out. He laughed softly, as if what Johnny had said amused him.

"A liar, eh! No, no, Johnny—you mustn't say that, yer know—leads to fightin'—no, no, Johnny, we're old friends, you an' me——"

"Friends!" said Johnny bitterly, "I'd rather not be friends with you, Doddrick—you were friends with the chief——"

"The best friend he ever 'ad," said Malachi, nodding his head and fingering his little black mustache.

"You showed it to-day, didn't you, ruinin' his engines?"

"Me!" said Malachi. "What makes you say things like that, Johnny? You've no proof—none at all——"

"What other proof do I want—you wanted to get him into trouble an' you dropped a handful of brass filings into the bearings, so the white metal would melt and the oil ways choke. I'm not blind, quite, Mr. Doddrick . . . who else is there on board that hates the chief like you do? Who else would do a thing like that? It wasn't Prott or me, an' you know it wasn't the donkey-man, an' it wasn't none of the stokehold hands, neither. It was you, of course."

Malachi smiled.

"Well, well—clever, ain't we! You're gettin' quite a bright child, Johnny, ain't yer? You're right, though, I did put the filin's into the ruddy bearin's—right hunder yer nose—an' yer didn't see! An' why did I do it, eh?"

Johnny was puzzled. There was a look of triumph in Malachi's eyes that was new.

"To get the chief into trouble, same as I said."

"Listen," said Malachi, and he gave a quick glance around the empty deck. "Listen, Johnny, if a man loved a woman better than anything on earth an' wanted to 'elp 'er when she needed 'elp most, he'd do everything to make 'er 'appy, wouldn't 'e? He might even go so far as to try an' get 'er 'usband back to 'er—even if the 'usband ain't worthy to be 'er 'usband!"

His voice broke.

"My ——! Johnny, could I let Ellen suffer like that without tryin' to do what I could do to 'elp? He's goin' back to her now, —— him!—an' she'll be 'appy an' she'll get better. 'E's a lucky man is Andrew—luckier by far than he oughter be."

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Johnny stared at him for a while without speaking.

"Malachi," he said presently, "I owe you something for what you done to me with that oil-can. I was goin' to half-kill you—mebbe I won't, though—not now. Tell me—what's it all mean? You told me you hated the chief an' Ellen, too!"

"Ah!" said Malachi: "I was wrong there—about Ellen, anyway. But Andrew ——! I 'ated *'im* right enough. I 'ate him now. But if I 'urt Andrew, I 'urt Ellen. Johnny, you won't say a word if I tell yer something——"

"No," said Johnny, puzzled by the look of weariness and exhaustion in the ugly little face. "No, not if you don't want——"

"Listen, then. I was goin' to marry Ellen long before Andrew ever knew 'er. I wanted to save up money an' buy a 'ome an' furniture, an' then I took Andrew MacKavie to see 'er, an' that finished it. Would you like to 'ear 'ow I come to meet her in the first place? You always 'ated me, Johnny, I know. Mebbe you think I wasn't justified in 'atin' Andrew. Listen to me a minute an' I'll explain. I met Ellen in London. 'Er father an' mother was dead an' she lived with an aunt an' 'er aunt's 'usband who kept a small public 'ouse down by the West India Dock. It wasn't charity, neither, as they made 'er serve in the bar. She was a good girl, Ellen was—there ain't a livin' soul what could say she wasn't—an' she was sellin' booze an' list'nin' to all sorts o' talk from mates an' engineers off the ships. You understand how it was, Johnny, don't yer? An' she 'atin' it!

"We got friendly one way an' another an' then she told me 'er story. She didn't talk promiscuous, neither. She wasn't one to make friends easy, for all her good looks—no, she wasn't, an' don't you think it! An' then, Johnny—then there come the trouble. I went in one night in time to 'ear a man, second-mate off a West Hartlepool boat, sayin' things he didn't ought to 'ave said—three parts full 'e was an' askin' her if 'e might go 'ome with her—a decent girl 'avin' to 'ear things like that—I ain't a fighter, Johnny, not bein' built that way, but I fought then—like —— an' I give as much as I got before we was thrown out, the pair of us, into the street. I finished him off in the gutter—'arf killed him in spite of the police—yes, Johnny, it's the truth.

"I went round to the pub next mornin' an' just took the girl away from the place. Yes, it's a fact. I walked in an' got her away from that aunt of hers—after I'd smashed up the aunt's 'usband. An' then—then I carried 'er off to some cousins o' mine, out Islin'ton way. She offered to marry me, Johnny, then an' there, if I'd 'ave 'er, but I waited same as I said. She was grateful, Ellen was —— grateful—I was the only man in the 'ole world she would trust.

"Well, I paid for 'er keep for about a year. I bought all 'er clothes—a reg'lar trousseau—I gave 'er money to spend—an' then—then, Johnny, she run away from me an' went off to Andrew an' married him. She wrote an' told me she'd found out 'er mistake in time. We wasn't suited, she said. I'd introduced 'er an' Andrew when we come 'ome at the end of the first voyage after I got her away from her aunt. At the end of the next voyage she was waitin' to marry 'im. They'd fixed it all up when we was at sea—everything—they was writin' letters to each other—an' I never knew it—never. They were careful, of course. I found that out since. Andrew used to address his letters to some one else—she used to get a friend to write 'is name on the envelopes she sent 'im! An' me—all the time I was writin' to Ellen, too—an' she was writin' to me! Funny, wasn't it? That's why I 'ated Andrew—an' 'er, too——"

There was a long silence.

"What are you goin' to do now, Malachi?"

"Me!" Malachi gave a shrug of his shoulders. "I'm goin' to pack my bag. I've done with this ship an' every other ship, the sea, Liverpool, everything! I'm goin' away, Johnny, or mebbe I'd try an' kill Andrew—or you, Johnny——"

He began to chuckle. "——! I marked yer, didn't I? But I 'ad to do something, Johnny, to keep yer away from them bearin's——"

"What about the inquiry?" said Johnny.

"I'm leavin' a note, Johnny, sayin' it was me put the filin's into the ruddy bearin's. So no one can't be blamed but me! If you'd 'ated a man as much as I 'ated Andrew, an' if you'd been storin' up in yer heart the thought of the revenge you was goin' to 'ave, it 'ud kind of sicken yer to feel you'd 'elped him like I've 'elped Andrew, wouldn't it!"

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And with that Malachi turned and walked off, whistling between his teeth, as one without a care in the world.

Before midnight he was clear of the ship.

EARLY the next morning while Johnny Gillowan was sitting over his breakfast Andrew MacKavie entered the mess-room. He looked very sleepy, but the worried, harassed look had gone from his eyes.

"Morn'," he said, dropping into his seat at the head of the table.

"Good mornin', chief," said Johnny. "How's everything goin' on——"

"Fine, Johnny—fine—thenk God!" He waited until the mess-room lad had poured him out a cup of tea, then he went on. "They tell't me my comin' hame mad' all the diff'rence. I've a notion that but fur the metal rinnin' oot the bearin's, I'd ha'e lost ma wife. But what a nicht! It's been haurd wark—aye, haurd wark it's been! What's mair, I'm no' lukin' forrart tae the day——"

He paused and took a letter out of his pocket.

"Did ye ken that Malachi had rin awa'?" he asked.

"What's that?" said Johnny, trying to show the right amount of astonishment in his expression. "Run away! Lord! I might have guessed that he'd give you the slip, chief, after what he did!"

"Aye," said the chief. "He left a letter, tellin' me a'. There's nae unnerstaun'in' some things. Malachi hatit me, an' he wantit tae hurt me. He ses that in the letter. Ye were richt, Johnny—I didna believe ye. I never liked the man, never—but I used to let him foller me roon because he wud make me lauch. Aye, I used tae think he was saft—an' I wud peety him—an' noo—noo he gangs an' does me the biggest sairvice yin man cud dae anither! He was aimin' to pay me oot fur mairryin' Ellen. The puir foo'! Hoo cud Ellen mairry him efter she learned that it was me that she loved? He cudna dae what he had planned, so he ses—tae his deep regret! If he did me ony hairm, it wud ha'e hurt the lass! A-weel, he may be disappintit, but he's done what he was hopin, tae dae, a' the sam'! That trick o' his wi' the bearin's has evened things aff!"

"You mean, that they'll hold you responsible, chief!" said Johnny.

"Aye," said Andrew, "they wull that, o' course. But I wasna thinkin' o' that—the wife's gaun on a' richt—an' that's a' that I'm heedin' the noo. But I'm in Malachi's debt as lang as I leeve. I owe everything in the worrul' tae him. It was Malachi mad' me acqaintit wi' Ellen tae begin wi'—it was Malachi saved her life—they was afeart she wud dee if I didna come hame—aye, that's a fac'! He's had his revenge, Malachi has, an' he disna ken!"

The mess-room lad thrust his head through the doorway.

"Sup'rintendent's comin' along the quay, sir."

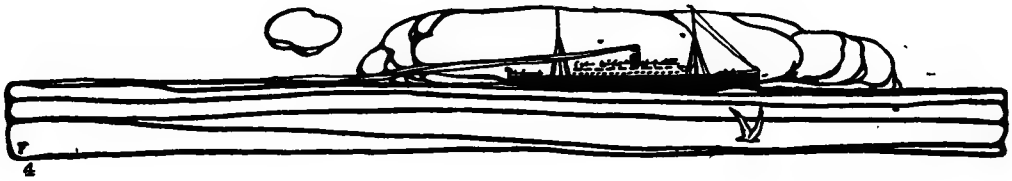
"A-weel," said the chief, "noo fur mair trouble! They'll esk me what fur I was no' in the engine-room—what fur I didna ken Malachi was gaun tae pit filin's in the bearin's—they may esk! I'll gi'e them Malachi's letter tae read, mebbe they'll believe what he's wrote—mebbe they winna. I dinna care—yin way or the ither."

He rose to his feet slowly.

"I wud like tae thenk Malachi fur what he's done—I wunner when I'll see him agin——"

"Maybe, never," said Johnny. Remembering the look in Malachi's eyes when he said good-by and the bitterness in his voice, Johnny was of the opinion that no one on board the *White Lilac* would ever see Malachi Doddrick again. He had vanished—gone out like the flame of a slush lamp or a ship that puts to sea and never comes back.

Having made life possible for his enemy, his own life would hardly be worth living.



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The DOOM TRAIL

Arthur D. Howden Smith

A Five-Part Story, Part One

Author of "Man to Man," "Claymore," Etc.

PROLOG

O MY reader, rest a while at our Council Fire before you set your feet upon the long trail which leads into the dim regions of Ta-de, which is—or was—Yesterday.

See, we will sprinkle tobacco leaves upon the flames and on the spirals of the smoke ascending upward our words shall be carried to the ears of Ha-wen-ne-yu, the Great Spirit.

Behold, O my reader, we give you a White Belt in token that our words are straight.

That which has been is no more. We of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, the People of the Long House, are scattered so that only Ga-oh, the Old Man of the Winds, can tell where the remnants dwell. The Long House, where our women sowed and reaped and our warriors hunted, is the spoil of the white man. His roads have wiped out the trails stamped by our war parties in the days of our power. His towns have replaced our villages. He has chased the wild things into the recesses of the Adirondack hills.

The Great League itself, which Da-ga-no-we-da and Ha-yo-wont-ha, the Founders, intended should live for all time, is no more than a memory locked in our breasts. The Council Fire which they kindled no longer burns at Onondaga. Gone is the Ho-yar-na-go-war, the Council of the Roy-an-ehs, whose word was supreme from the shores of the Great Lakes to the lands of the Wa-sa-seh-o-no, whom the white men call the Sioux, and the O-ya-da-go-o-no, whom the white men name the Cherokees. The Seneca Wolves have abandoned their watch at the Western Door of the Long House which opens upon the Thunder Waters of Jagara; the Mohawk Wolves no longer guard the Eastern Door by the shores of the Ska-neh-ta-de, which the white men have renamed the Hudson.

It is meet that we should mourn. But hear us, O my reader, hear us further.

Once we were a nation. Once we were strong. Once even the white man feared us. Once it was for us to say who should rule the land outside the Long House, Frenchman or Englishman. The white men were weak then. They clamored for our aid. We chose the side of the Englishman. He triumphed.

Remember, O my reader, but for us you might not have been here to sit by our Council Fire tonight. Black Robe and de Veulle, Murray and Joncaire, would have won the struggle; the French King would have become master. All that has come to pass would never have been. The unfolding years would have told another story. But the People of the Long House cast their fortunes with Governor Burnet, who in our tongue was called Ga-en-gwa-ra-go, and Ormerod, whom the Keepers of the Faith renamed O-te-ti-ani. It was Ta-wan-ne-ars and the warriors of the Eight Clans who helped O-te-ti-ani and Corlaer, the Dutchman with the fat belly, to break down the barriers of "The Doom Trail" and overcome the "Keepers of the Trail."

Remember that, O my reader. This tale which follows is true talk. It was as it is written.

Na-hol

CHAPTER I

THE FRAY IN MINCING LANE

"WATCH! Ho, watch!"

The words rang through the misty darkness of the narrow street. I gathered my cloak around me and skulked closer to the nearest house-wall. Could it be possible the Bow Street runners had picked up my trail again?

And a new worry assailed me. Did the cry come from in front or behind? The fog that mantled London, and which so far had stood my friend, now served to muffle the source of this sudden alarm. Which way should I turn?

"Watch! Curse the sleepy varlets!"

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The houses past which I had been feeling my way came to an end. An alley branched off to the right and from its entrance echoed the click of steel-music after my own heart. The blood coursed faster in my veins. No, this could be no trap such as had awaited me ever since I had stepped from the smuggler's small boat. Here was sword-play, a welcome change from the plotting and intrigue which had sickened me.

I cast my cloak back over my shoulder and drew my sword from its sheath, as I ran over the uneven cobbles which paved the alley. Dimly I saw before me a confused huddle of figures that tussled and stamped about in the ghostly mirk of the fog.

"Hold, friend," I shouted.

"Make haste," panted a voice from the middle of the group. "Ha, you scoundrel! You pinked me then."

One man against a gang of assassins! So that was the story. It savored more of Paris than of the staid London of merchants and shop-keepers over which the Hanoverian exercised his stolid sway.

But I had scant time for philosophy. A figure detached itself from the central swarm and came lunging at me with cutlas aswing. I parried his blade and touched him in the shoulder. He bellowed for aid.

"This is no fat alderman, bullies. He wields a swift point. To me, a brace of ye."

They were on me in an instant, my first assailant in front, an assassin on either hand, slashing with hangers and cutlases that knew no tricks of fence, but only downright force. Their former prey was left with one to handle.

"Get to his rear, one of you, fools," snarled the ruffian in command whilst he pounded at my guard.

But I backed into a handy doorway and barely managed to fend them off. And all the while the real object of their attack continued his appeals for the watch.

'Twas this which spoiled the fray for me. I could not but wonder, as I dodged and parried and thrust, what would happen if his cries should be heard and the watch appear. Would they know me? Or perchance should I have the opportunity to slip quietly away?

I stole a glance about me. Several windows had gone up along the street, and nightcapped heads protruded to add their clamor to that of my friend.

Surely— Aye, they had done it. The ruffian on my left leaped back with ear aslant toward the alley entrance.

"Quick, bullies," he yelled. "'Tis the watch!"

With a celerity that was almost uncanny they disengaged their blades and melted into the fog. Their footfalls dwindled around the corner as I detected the clumping footfalls of the approaching guardians of London's peace.

This brought me to my senses. I sheathed my sword and ran across the roadway, glancing to right and left for the best route of escape. But I reckoned without the other participant in our brawl.

"Be at ease, my master," he said in a voice which had a good thick Dorset burr in it—I liked him from that moment. It sounded so homelike; I could fairly see the rolling fields, the water meadows, the copses, all the scenes that had meant so much to me in boyhood, even the sprawling roofs and chimney stacks of Foxcroft House itself.

"I have reasons not to be at ease," I answered dryly, and would have passed him, but he clutched my arm.

"We have seen an end to the rascals," he strove to reassure me. "'Tis only the watch you hear. Hark to the jingling of their staves."

"I know that full well, my friend," I answered him, goose-flesh rising on my neck as the jingling staves and clumping feet drew nearer; and my thoughts fastened upon the dungeons of the Tower about which we had heard frequent tales at St. Germain. "But I happen to have pressing reasons for avoiding the watch."

My friend pursed his lips in a low whistle.

"So sets the wind in that quarter! Yet you came fast to my help against those cutpurses a moment back."

I laughed. The watch were all but in the alley's mouth. 'Twas idle to think of running now. Indeed, to have done so would have been to banish whatever slight chance I might have had.

"Oh, I am no highwayman," I said.

"Well, whatever you may be, you aided Robert Juggins in his peril, and 'twill be a sore pity if a Worshipful Alderman of the City may not see you through the scrutiny of a band of lazy bench-loafers."

"That is good hearing," I answered.

"Will they have your description?"

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"I think not, but if they ask me to account for myself I shall be at fault. I am but lately landed from France, and I have no passport."

He pursed his lips once more in the quaint form of a low whistle.

"I begin to see. Well, my master, we will talk of your plight anon. For the present I have somewhat to say to our gallant rescuers which will put their thoughts upon other matters than young men fresh landed from France without passports to identify themselves by."

He swept a shrewd glance over me from my hat to my heels.

"There is a foreign cut to your wig that I do not like," he commented. "However we will brazen it out. Here they come."

THE watchmen rounded the corner into the alley, lanterns swinging high, staves poised.

"Ho, knaves," proclaimed a pompous voice, "stand and deliver yourselves to us."

"And who may you be?" demanded my friend.

"No friends to brawlers and disturbers of the peace, sirrah," replied the stoutest of the watchmen, stepping to the front of his fellows. "We are the duly constituted and appointed constables and watchmen of his Honor the Worshipful Lord Mayor."

"It would be nearer truth to say that you are the properly constituted and habituated sleepers and time-servers of the city," snapped my companion. "Draw nearer, and examine me."

"Be not rash, captain," quavered one of the watchmen. "He hath the appearance of a most desperate Mohock."

"Nay, sir," adjured the captain of the watch portentously, "do you approach and render yourselves to us. 'Tis not for law-breakers to order the city's watchmen how they shall be apprehended."

"You fool," said my friend very pleasantly, "if you would only trust your eyes you would see a face you have many times seen before this—aye, and shall see again in the morning before the bench of sheriffs when you plead forgiveness for your dilatory performance of the duties entrusted to you."

The watchmen were confused.

"Be cautious, my masters," pleaded the one with the quavering voice. "'Tis like enough a desperate rogue and a strong."

My friend left my side and strode forward toward the captain of the watch, who gave back a pace or two until he felt the stomachs of his followers at his back.

"How now," said he who had called himself Robert Juggins, "hold up that lantern, you, sirrah, with the shaking arm. Look into my face, lazy dogs that you are. Dost know me?"

"'Tis Master Juggins," quoth the quavering voice. "Praise be for that."

"You know me, now?" pressed Master Juggins, poking his finger into the fat figure of the captain.

"Sure, you are Master Juggins," assented that official with sullen reluctance.

"And is an alderman of the city and a cupmate of the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs and the Warden of the Worshipful Company of Merchant Traders to the Western Plantations, on his way home from a meeting of his gild, within the city precincts—aye, in Mincing Lane, under the shadow of Paul's—I say am I to be held up by cut-purses, stabbed in the arm, forced to defend my very life—and then denounced and threatened with arrest by the watchmen paid by the city to protect its citizens?"

Master Juggins stopped perforce for breath.

"How say you, knaves?" he resumed. "Of what use have you been? Did you come at my call? Aye, like the sluggards you are. Have you done aught to run down the thieves and assassins who work under your noses?

"You stand here trying to prove that 'tis I, and not they, who have sought to rob myself. Go to! Ye are worthless, and I shall see that the Sheriffs and the Magistrates at Bow Street know of it."

"But, good Master Juggins," begged the captain, now thoroughly aroused to his plight, "sure you——"

"Sure I will," retorted Master Juggins who had caught another lungful of breath. "Had it not been for this good citizen here—" he swept an arm in my direction—"it had been a corpse you would have found. So much for your diligence and courage!"

"But we will be after the scoundrels, worshipful Master Alderman," pleaded the captain.

"Aye, we shall be hard on their heels, Master Juggins," assured he of the quavery voice.

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"Doubt not our diligence, worthy sir!" appealed a third.

"Can you but give us a description of the knaves?" suggested a fourth.

"Shall I do your work for you?" replied Master Juggins in his delightful Dorset burr. Zounds! How I liked the man with his broad humor, his ready courage and prompt good sense!

"Nay, but——"

"But me no buts. Be about your rounds. And if you see any hang-dog-looking rogues or homeless knaves or masterless men, do you apprehend them for the night and lodge them in the Fleet. In the morning you may let me know what you have done. I will then consider whether your belated efforts may overset your cowardice and laziness in the beginning."

"It shall be as you say, good Master Juggins," assented the captain meekly. "Which way went your assailants?"

"What? More questions?" exploded Master Juggins. "Nay, this is too much."

The watchmen turned in their tracks and herded out of the alley like bewildered cattle, all clumping boots, jingling staffs, waving lanterns and jumbled wits. My savior removed his hat and mopped his brow with a white kerchief.

"So much for that," he remarked cheerfully. "Now——"

But he was interrupted from an unexpected quarter. The captain of the watch returned alone.

"I crave your pardon, Master Juggins," he began.

"You well may," agreed Master Juggins.

"Aye; but, good sir, if you will be so kind——"

"Kind I will not be. What, sirrah, after all the insults I have listened to and being nearly murdered into the bargain?"

"No, but worshipful Master Alderman, do you but bear with me an instant. I have a thought——"

"'Tis impossible," pronounced Master Juggins solemnly.

I FELT my heart warm to the man. If he was typical of the London citizens then was I glad to be quit of St. Germain and all its atmosphere of petty intrigues and Jesuitical sophistries.

"Aye, but I have," insisted the captain. "We have been warned to keep a watch for a dangerous malefactor, an enemy of the State, one Ormerod, an emissary of the Pretender who is here on an errand against the Crown."

Juggins favored me with a cursory glance of a somewhat peculiar nature. It was not exactly hostile, and yet much of the friendliness which had characterized his manner was gone.

I felt cold chills running down my back. Would he give me up? What right after all had I to expect better treatment from a total stranger, a man who had nothing to gain from shielding me? My knowledge of the world had been acquired mainly from the life of the French Court, and I may be entitled to forgiveness if I was skeptical of any man's disinterestedness of purpose. 'Twas not the way with those with whom I had been familiar.

"Go on," said Juggins coldly to the watchman, withdrawing his attention from me.

"Why, worshipful sir, there is no more to say. It is just that I thought, the attack being made upon you, a well-known citizen, it might have been——"

"And how should I know this person of whom you speak?"

"Why, sir, that I can not——"

"Be about your duties, sirrah," interrupted Master Juggins, "and pester me no longer."

The captain stumped off to where his faithful band awaited him, the several curious-minded citizens who had listened to the altercation from the vantage-point of their bedroom windows retired to resume their slumbers and Master Juggins strode back to my side.

"Is your name Ormerod?" he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I am Harry Ormerod, once a captain of foot under the Duke of Berwick; and I formerly had the honor to be chamberlain to the man whom some people call King James the Third."

"You are a Papist?"

"No, sir."

"But you are a rebel, a conspirator against the Crown?"

"I do not expect you to believe me, of course," I answered as lightly as I could, "but I am not a rebel—in spirit or intent, at any rate—and I am not conspiring against the Crown at this moment—although I have done so in the past—and I am at this moment a fugitive from justice."

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"Humph," said Master Juggins thoughtfully.

He stood there in the middle of the alley, caressing his shaven chin, heedless of the thin trickle of blood that flowed from the wound in the flesh of his left arm.

"Ormerod," he murmured. "Harry Ormerod. But surely—of course—why, you are Ormerod of Foxcroft in Dorset."

I shook my head sadly.

"No, my friend; if you know that story you must know that I *was* Ormerod of Foxcroft House."

Master Juggins was suddenly all animation.

"I know it well," he returned. "You and Charles, your elder brother, were both out in the '19. Charles died in Scotland, and you escaped with the remnants of the expedition to France."

"And Foxcroft House was sequestrated to the Crown," I amended bitterly.

"The Hampshire branch have it now," went on Master Juggins. "They toadied it through the Pelhams."

"Yes, —— them!"

I had forgotten my surroundings, forgotten the dingy cobbles of Mincing Lane, forgotten the strange circumstances under which I had met this strange person who seemed so intimately versed in my family history. My thoughts were back for the moment in the soft green Dorset countryside of my boyhood. I lived over again the brave days at Foxcroft when Charles had been master and I his lieutenant. But the moment passed, the memories faded, and my eyes saw again the drab buildings of the alley and the odd figure of my deliverer—whom I had first delivered.

"And you, sir," I said. "May I ask how it happens you know so much concerning the fortunes of a plain Dorset family?"

He seemed not to hear me, standing there in a brown study, and I spoke to him again sharply.

"Yes, yes; I heard," he answered, almost impatiently. "I was— But this is no place for discussion. Come with me to my house. I live in Holborn, not many minutes walk from here."

Some trace of my feelings must have been revealed in my attitude—my face he could not have seen in the darkness—for he continued:

"You need not fear me, Master Ormerod. I mean you no harm. I could not do harm to your father's son."

"But you?" I asked. "Who are you, sir?"

He chuckled dryly.

"You know my name," he answered, "and you heard the watch acknowledge my civic dignity. For the rest—if you have spent much time in Dorset you should know a Dorset voice."

"I do that," I assented heartily, "and 'tis grateful to my ears."

"Then be content with that, sir, for a few minutes. Come, let us be on our way. I have reasons for not wishing to invite a second attack upon us."

He set off at a great pace, his head buried in his cloak collar, and I walked beside him, puzzled exceedingly.

CHAPTER II

SMALL TALK AND MULLED ALE

TEN minutes later we stopped before a tall, gabled house of brick and timber on the near side of Holborn. My companion produced a key from his person and unlocked a heavy door which opened upon a staircase leading to the second story. The first floor was occupied by a shop. Over the window was hung a small stuffed animal, who seemed to be attempting to climb the front wall as the wind swayed him to and fro.

"Enter, Master Ormerod," said Juggins. "You are right welcome. I hope you have none of the country gentleman's scorn for the home of an honest merchant."

"A beggar must not be a chooser," I answered. "But if I were not indebted to you for my liberty I should still be glad to visit a Dorset man who knows how to fight and who remembers the woods of Foxcroft."

"Well spoken," applauded Juggins as he fastened the door behind us and lit the candle in a lantern which was ready on a shelf in the vestibule at the foot of the stairs. "So I might have expected your father's son to speak."

"That is the second time you have called me 'my father's son,'" I said. "Prithee, Master Juggins, had you acquaintance with my father?"

"Bide, bide," he replied enigmatically. "We shall settle all that anon. After you, sir."

And he ushered me up the stairs, which were hung with the skins of many kinds of

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animals, some of which I did not even know. At intervals, too, were suspended various savage weapons—bows, arrows and clubs—gaily painted and decorated with feathers.

The stairs gave upon a large hall, similarly decorated, and through this we passed into a comfortable chamber which stretched across the front of the house. At one side blazed a warm fire under a massive chimney-piece; candelabra shed a soft glow over thick rugs and skins, polished furniture and well-filled shelves along the walls.

Master Juggins relieved me of my cloak and hat and motioned to a deep chair in front of the fire.

"Rest yourself, Master Ormerod. Presently we shall have provender for the inner man as well."

"But your arm?" I suggested, pointing to the bloody stains on his coat sleeve. "I am not unskilled in such matters, if——"

"I doubt not, sir; but I have one at hand, I make bold to say, has forgotten more than you ever learned of cures and simples."

He went to the door by which we had entered and clapped his hands.

"Ho, Goody! Art abed after all?"

"Abed? Abed?" answered a thin, old voice that was inexpressibly sweet, with a Dorset burr that made Master Robert's sound like the twang of a Londoner. "The lad is mad! Gadding around at all hours of the night; aye, sparking in his old age, I'll be bound, with never a thought to his granny at home or the worries he pours on her head. Abed? says he. When did I ever feel the sheets, and not knowing he was warm and safe and his posset-cup where it belongs—which is in his stomach? Abed? Didst ever find——"

She stepped into the room, a quaint little figure in hodden-gray, a dainty cap perched on her wispy white hair, her brown eyes gleaming in the candle-light, the criss-crossed wrinkles of her cheeks shining like a network of fine lace. In her hands she held a tray supporting a steaming flagon and divers covered dishes of pewterware.

Juggins favored me with a humorous glance.

"Sure, I grow more troublesome year by year, granny," he said as she paused at sight of me. "Here I am come home later than ever, bringing a guest with me."

But she made no answer, and as I looked closer at her I saw that she had perceived the blood on his sleeve. She tottered in her tracks, and I jumped to take the tray from her hands. But she regained her self-command, waved me away with a nod of her head and stepped quickly across the chamber to a table by the fire.

In an instant she was at Master Juggins' side and had stripped the coat off his arm and shoulder. Then she stepped back with a sigh of relief, and for the second time looked at me.

"'Tis nothing, after all," she said. "But ever since he came back from those years amongst the savages when I had thought him dead a score of times and——"

She broke off to glance swiftly at Juggins' face.

"Who did it? Was it——"

She hesitated, and he answered before she could continue:

"Aye; it was he, granny, or minions hired by him. But enough of that for the present. You have not spoken to our guest. Who think you he is?"

"Whoever he may be, if he helped you in danger, Robert, he is a good lad and we owe him thanks."

She swept me a stately courtesy such as might have graced a court ball at Versailles.

"No, the boot is on the other leg," I protested. "'Tis I who owe gratitude to Master Juggins, for he has taken me in out of the cold and the fog—and worse dangers perhaps."

"Poor young gentleman," she said softly. "For you are gentle, young sir. I did not live my youth in gentlefolks' houses for naught, and I can see gentility when it comes before my eyes, old though they be."

"You have not asked his name," suggested Master Juggins.

She looked at us inquiringly.

"'Tis Master Ormerod."

"Ormerod? Not——"

"Aye; Master Harry."

"But he is in France!"

"Nay; he is here."

"But——"

SHE drew closer, and studied my features under the candles that shone from the mantel-shelf.

"Is he in danger?" she asked breathlessly.

"The watch were after him when he came to my rescue," replied Juggins.

"Yet he came."

She patted my cheek with her hand.

"That was a deed which you need never

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be shamed of, Master Ormerod, and you shall win free to safety, whatever it may be or wherever, if Robert and I have any wits between us."

"But, granny," protested Juggins, "he is a rebel. He has just landed from France on a mission against the Crown."

"A rebel? Against the Crown?"

Her eyes flared.

"Tut! A likely tale! And what if he has? Is he not an Ormerod? His father's son?"

She wheeled around upon me.

"Your father was Sidney Ormerod?"

"Yes," I assented dazedly.

"Are you in truth a rebel?" she demanded without giving me time to catch my breath.

"Faith, I was one."

"But are you one now?"

"Not in my own heart; but the Bow Street runners think otherwise."

"A fig for them!" she cried. "Men have little enough sense, and when you place 'em in authority they grow imbecile. Sit yourself down again, Master Ormerod, the while I set a bandage about this arm of Robert's, and then you shall have a draft of mulled ale and a dish of deviled bones and thereafterward a bed with sheets that have lain in Dorset lavender. Hath it a welcome sound to you?"

The tears came into my eyes.

"I am happier this night than I have been any time since Charles and I left Foxcroft," I said. "But pray tell me why you two, who are strangers to me, should be so interested in an outcast?"

"He does not know?" exclaimed the little old lady.

"I have told him nothing," said Juggins, smiling.

"Tut, tut," she rebuked him. "Was it well to be tight-mouthed with an Ormerod?"

"I found him in the fog out there—or rather he found me," answered Juggins humorously. "And I did not know he was this side of St. Germain."

"Well, 'tis time enough he knew he was amongst the right sort of friends," the little lady said, her fingers all the time busied in adjusting bandages to the wounded arm. "You are too young, Master Ormerod, to remember old Peter Juggins——"

A light burst upon my addled wits.

"Why, of course!" I cried. "He was steward under my father, and in his father's time before him! But you?"

"Peter was my husband," she said simply. "Robert here is our grandson. As I said, sir, it was all too long ago for you to remember; but when Peter died your father offered his place to Robert. Robert would have none of it. He had the wandering bee in his bonnet. He was young, and he must see the world. He would make his fortune, too. No life as an estate steward for him."

"And wise I was, too, granny," interjected Master Juggins. "Even you will grant that now."

"Be not too elevated by your good fortune," she retorted. "Had you followed your grandfather at Foxcroft your counsel might have restrained Master Harry and his brother from their madness——"

"I wish it might have," I said bitterly, thinking of Charles' lonely grave on a mist-draped hillside in the Scotch Highlands.

"But in that case," Master Juggins gravely pointed out, "you would not have been at hand to rescue me tonight."

"Nor would you have been getting yourself mixed into intrigues which would place you in fear of assassination," she snapped. "Have done with your foolery, Robert. Master Ormerod knows naught of his father's kindness to you."

"He shall have earnest enough of it anon," returned Juggins heartily. "But do you go on, granny. You make a brave tale-teller."

She tweaked him by the ear as if he had been a small lad, gave a final pat to the neat bandage she had fastened over his wound and continued:

"Many a gentleman would have taken in bad part such an answer to an offer made in kindness, Master Ormerod. But not your father. No, after trying all he could by fair means to dissuade Robert from his course, he asked where his fancies drifted, and then supplied him with money for the voyage to the Western Plantations and to enable him to secure a start when he entered the wilderness."

"Granny still has the Londoner's idea of New York Province," explained Juggins humorously. "'Tis a wilderness in the Western Plantations. And in New York, which has grown a fine, thriving town since we wrested it from the Dutch, they regard England as a welcome market for furs over against the side of Europe."

"'Tis north of the Virginias and this side of the French settlements in Canada, is it

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not?" I asked, more in politeness than in interest.

"Aye, Master Ormerod; and you could drop all of England and Scotland and Wales into it, and then go out and win new lands from the savages if you felt overcrowded."

"Y'are driving beside the point, Robert," declared the little old lady with round displeasure. "Would you seek to belittle the generosity of Master Ormerod's father? No? Then have done."

She turned to me.

"Indeed," she added, "'tis as I have told you, sir; we are greatly indebted to you. All that you see here we owe to your father's kindness. 'Twas that permitted Robert to go overseas and to set himself up as a fur-trader there and afterwards to return and establish his business down-stairs, which hath grown so that it is more than he can handle—aye, and to become in good time, as he has, Warden of the Worshipful Company of Merchant Traders to the Western Plantations. All of it, I say, we owe to you."

"All of it, granny," reaffirmed Master Juggins himself. "Y'have not made it one whit too stong for me. But now, look you, Goody, the hour is late for old folks——"

"You are not so young yourself, Robert," she remarked tartly.

"Nay, granny dear, I do not seek the last word with you," he laughed. "'Tis only that I would find out before we sleep how I may be of aid to Master Ormerod."

"Aid?" quoth she. "All that we have in the world is his, if he wants it; aye, the clothes off our backs."

She swept me another courtesy, deeper than ever—just such a one, I fancy, as she made to my mother when she brought her the housekeeper's keys.

"Good night to you, Master Ormerod. And remember, this house, poor though it be for your father's son, is to be your home until you have a better."

I ROSE and bowed my acknowledgments, but I could not speak. My heart was too full. Here in this bleak, unfriendly London, which had greeted me with suspicion and persecution, I had found friendship and assistance. My fortunes, at ebb an hour before, now seemed about to flow toward a happier future. It was almost too good to believe.

"I have no claim upon you, Master Juggins," I exclaimed as the door closed behind his grandmother. "Remember that. And let me not imperil for one moment two friends of my father, who revere his memory as I had not supposed any did, save myself."

He pushed me down into my chair by the fire.

"There is no question of claim, sir. 'Tis a privilege. Now do you set this glass to your lips. How tastes it?"

"Most excellent. In France they must spice their mulled drinks to make them palatable. No need to add aught to good, ripe English ale."

"You have not lost the tongue of an Englishman, Master Ormerod, and for that let us be thankful. Aye, 'tis a crotchet of mine to drink a posset of ale, fetched from a brewer in Dorset whose ways are known to me, each night before I rest. It settles the digestion—although my friends the savages in North America do protest that naught is necessary upon retiring save a long drink of clear, cold water."

"You have fought hard for the comfort I see around me?" I suggested.

"Aye, but we shall have time anon to speak of that. Do you tell me now of your present plight. Fear not to be frank with me, Master Ormerod. I do not mix in politics. I am none of your red-hot loyalists who would hang a man because he remarks that our worthy King is Hanoverian by birth. But on the other hand I'll have naught to do with these plotters who fume over the exiled Stuarts.

"The Stuarts went, sir, because they overtaxed the forbearance of a long-suffering people. They might have returned ere this, as you know, had they possessed the good sense to appreciate what their whilom people required. But they lacked that good sense, Master Ormerod, and with all deference I say to you they will never return unless they learn that lesson—and abjure Popery—very soon."

I leaned forward in my chair and interrupted him, the words bubbling from my lips.

"I could not have put neater my own feelings, Master Juggins. When I was a lad not yet of age I risked all I had for the Stuart cause. What came of it? A life of exile that might have ruined me, as it has many a better man. My family's estate was sequestrated; my outlawry was

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proclaimed. I have no place to lay my head, save it be by the bounty of a foreigner.

"Have I secured any moral satisfaction by these sacrifices? At first I thought I had.

"They told me it was all for the Good Cause, the Cause that some day must triumph. The man you call the Pretender—it irks my lips to brand him so, despite how I have suffered in his name—took me by the hand, made me a chamberlain at his trumpery Court. I received a commission to fight under an English prince in foreign wars, mayhap against my own land. 'Tis only accident has averted that so far.

"But when I looked closer I found that I had done nothing for my country. For this prince, whom some men call King and some Pretender, yes. But for my country, nothing.

"This made me think the harder, Master Juggins. At the beginning I had taken zest in the plots and plans which were aimed to bring about his restoration to power.

"But the longer I studied them the more insincere they became. I found my leader a catspaw of foreigners, used to undermine England's prestige. His spies were in the pay of Papists. His aims were not the good of England, but his own aggrandizement, the winning back of my country to the Pope, the furthering of France's ambitions."

Master Juggins reached over and smote me on the knee.

"Hast learned that, lad? Why, then, there's no more loyal Englishman in London!"

"So you think," I answered. "So I think. But hear me out. I brought myself to abandon my friends in France, the only friends I had. I told my feelings to a certain great gentleman who handles affairs at St. Germain. He cursed me for a turncoat, would have ordered his lackeys to flog me from the palace. I left him—in disgrace. The doors of my friends were closed to me. I thought I would make my way to England and begin a new life.

"So I applied to the English ambassador for a passport. He laughed at me. Did I think he was so innocent as to be blinded by such transparent trickery? Nay, the Pretender must seek otherwhere for means to plant a fresh spy in England. In desperation then I sold a miniature of my mother's——"

Master Juggins held up his hand.

"Where?" he asked eagerly.

"How?" I replied, not understanding.

"Where sold you this miniature? To what dealer?"

"'Twas a Jew named Levy close by the Quai de l'Horloge."

"Good," he said with satisfaction. "It shall be recovered."

"But, Master Juggins——"

"Tush, sir," he brushed my objection aside. "'Tis naught. Some day you shall refund the money, if you wish But I would not have you lose the miniature. I loved your lady mother, if I may say so."

I pressed his hand, and struggled for words to answer. But he would have none, and insisted that I continue my story.

"So you secured funds?" he said. "And next?"

"I bought passage from a smuggler of Dieppe, who landed me three weeks since in Sussex. I made my way to Dorset, hoping to find old friends who would help me to gain a pardon; but in Dorchester High Street I was recognized by one of my cousins who now hold Foxcroft House, and he raised a hue and cry after me, fearing no doubt that I sought to regain the estate.

"Since then I have been hunted like a beast. My last shilling was spent this morning. Tomorrow, had I escaped so long, I planned to sell my sword, and if all else failed to seek a press-gang."

"Let us thank God you heard my cries," said Juggins earnestly.

HE ROSE from his chair, a stout, square-built man with a shrewd, weather-beaten face and a manner of authority, despite the simplicity of his demeanor and attire.

"I do," I said, "and with no lack of reverence, my friend, I also thank you."

He gave me a keen look.

"You call me friend. Do you mean the word?"

"Why not?"

"I was your father's servant," he said, and he said it so that the words were at once proud and humble.

I caught his hand in mine.

"You were his friend, too; and who am I, an outlaw without name or fortune, to set myself above a man who has prospered like you through the diligence of his own hands and brain?"

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Master Juggins drew a deep breath and wrung my hand hard.

"You'll do, lad," he said. "My help would have been yours on any terms. But you have made it a glad privilege for me to help you. Doubt not we shall find a way.

"Now get you to bed. I shall have somewhat to say to you on the morrow."

CHAPTER III

BEFORE THE LORDS OF TRADE

HOW long I might have slept I know not, but the pallid sun that strove to pierce the fog-reek proclaimed high noon when Master Juggins waked me. He would not listen to my protestations of regret, but directed my attention to the pile of clothes he carried over his arm.

"See, we shall make a 'prentice lad of you," he said. "I have a youth downstairs of about your build, and these are his Sunday clothes."

"But what will he do?" I asked.

"Why, purchase new gear with a right merry heart."

"And must I in truth wear these?" I demanded with some disgust as I felt their coarseness of texture.

"Aye, indeed, Master Harry."

His tone sobered.

"I have been abroad since rising," he continued, "and forgive me if I say 'twas well for you we met last night. Your cousin is come up to London, frantic with fear lest you should succeed in replacing him, and he hath pulled wires right and left, so that all are convinced you are here for no less a purpose than the murder of the King."

I cursed with a fluency conferred by two languages.

"There is no hope of a pardon now," proceeded Juggins. "I am not altogether without influence, and I had hoped— But 'tis doubly hopeless. If you were Scots or Irish, it might be done. But few of the English gentry besides you and Master Charles rose in the '19. You are a marked man, and with your cousin's interest against you 'twill be impossible even to gain a hearing for you."

"There is naught to do, then, save go back to France and the friends who now distrust me," I said bitterly.

"Never say so," remonstrated Master Juggins with energy. "I have an idea of another course which may commend itself to you. Come, don these poor garments, which will none the less cloak you with safety, and join me in granny's morning-room."

The coffee which the old lady poured us in blue-bordered china bowls put new life and hope into me. I settled back in my chair, heedless of my baggy breeches and woolen stockings, and puffed at the long clay pipe which Juggins had filled for me.

Granny Juggins gave me an approving pat on the shoulder.

"That is well, Master Harry. Worry never solved any difficulty. And now I must be going about my duties; but remember that what Robert tells you hath my endorsement."

"And what is that?" I inquired in some curiosity as the door closed behind her.

He smoked in silence for several moments.

"I am resolved to take you fully into my confidence, Master Harry," he began at last, "and I should not do so if I doubted your discretion."

"I shall strive to justify your trust," I said.

"No doubt. 'Tis a delicate matter."

He fell silent again.

"Did it not seem strange to you that such an assault as you saw last night should have been made upon an ordinary merchant?" he asked suddenly.

"I thought they meant robbery."

"Robbery? They never made a demand upon me. They meant murder."

"That is strange," I conceded.

"The truth is, lad," he went on, "I am at grips with a deadly enemy. 'Tis a curious story, concerned with high politics, great spoils of trade, intrigues of Church and State—mayhap the future of a continent. And as it happens Robert Juggins is at the hub of it.

"Do you think you would like to play a hand—on England's behalf and to checkmate the very foreign influences which sickened you of the Jacobite cause? There are reasons why I think you might be of aid to me. I need a strong arm combined with an agile mind, a mind used to French ways and the French tongue."

I would have answered, but he checked me.

"If you accept you must be prepared to fight your old friends, for the enemy I have spoken of is Jacobite at heart and works

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under cover for the return of the Pretender through the weakening of England and the paramount influence of France. Remember that before you commit yourself.

"You must be prepared for no half-way measures. You have seen how my enemy fights. He does not stop at assassination. If you meet him weakly you will only insure your own death. On the other hand, if your efforts are successful you will have earned gratitude from the Government which should secure your pardon."

"Even as I told you last night, Master Juggins, I am for England now," I answered. "If such a plot as you speak of is under way, then surely 'tis for loyal Englishmen to thwart it. Count me with you, I pray."

"I will," he said quietly. "Now hark to these facts. At the instance of myself and my associates in the Company of Merchant Traders to the Western Plantations, the Provincial Government of New York several years ago secured the royal assent to a law prohibiting the sale of Indian trading-goods to the French in Canada.

"Our object was twofold. The best and cheapest trading-goods are manufactured in England. If we can keep them to ourselves and compel the French to use more costly and less durable goods made on the Continent we shall be able to underbid them with the Indians. So the fur-trade will come more and more into our hands."

"Is that so important?" I asked curiously.

"'Tis all-important, lad."

Juggins leaned forward and tapped me on the knee.

"North America," he went on, "is the richest land in all the world—how rich it is or how vast no man knows. 'Twill require centuries to exploit it. Since first we colonized there we have contended with France, not only for further power, but for the actual right to breathe. Our two countries can not agree to divide this domain, limitless though it be. Sooner or later one must oust the other."

"BUT the fur-trade?" I insisted, my curiosity now fully aroused.

"Aye; the fur-trade is the key to it all. The English, settled along the more southerly seaboard, with fertile lands, have devoted themselves mainly to farming. The French in Canada, with an inclement climate, have been driven to spread out their settlements in order to find room for subsistence. The English power is limited, but compact; the French is spread all around us. Both nations supplement their farming by trading with the savages for furs, and these furs are the principal export from New York to England.

"I said the fur-trade was the key. It is so, because neither the French nor we are yet sufficiently powerful to ignore the strength of the Indian tribes. The fur-trade is the source of the savages for securing trade goods. They will be bound closest to the country which gives them the best terms. If we can deprive the French of the ability to buy their goods as cheaply as we do, then we shall be able to trade to better advantage with the Indians and so increase their friendship for us. At the same time the volume of the provincial trade will be increased."

"I see," I answered. "But you spoke before of a twofold object in depriving the French of the right to obtain trade-goods through New York?"

"So I did, and that brings me to the enemy whom I mentioned. Heard you ever in Paris of one Murray—Andrew Murray?"

I shook my head.

"He hath connections with the French, and, too, with the Jacobites; but they would be well covered no doubt. Murray owns the Provincial Fur Company of New York, which is the largest of all the trading agencies. He hath set himself deliberately to drive out of existence all the independent traders and secure the entire trade for himself. The trade with the French in Canada likewise is in his hands.

"Before the Provincial Government passed the prohibitive law of which I spoke, he carried on this trade openly, and the French traders, helped by a government subsidy, more often than not underbid our traders—using English goods, mind you, for the purpose. And then the French traders would sell their skins in the London market at a lower price than our own traders could afford to charge.

"After the passage of the law, in spite of efforts to enforce it, Murray contrived to build up a clandestine means of shipping goods to Canada, and while the French are more pressed for cheap trade-goods than they were, nevertheless they are better off than they should be, and our traders are put

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at a disadvantage. Now the time for which the law was passed is expired, and the Provincial Government hath enacted it again. It comes up this afternoon before the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, when Murray will petition for its rejection."

"But surely he will lose," I objected.

Juggins shook his head.

"I fear not. The best we can hope for is a compromise."

"Yet you say he is in alliance with the French and the Jacobites!"

"I say that, Master Harry, but I can not prove it. Remember, even you, who have recently come from St. Germain, had never heard of him. Moreover he is hand in glove with the Pelhams and all the corrupt officials in Whitehall. He hath buttered many a grasping hand, and if he can secure his operations a few years longer he will have laid the groundwork for England's overthrow in the New World.

"I leave to your imagination the effect upon our people at home of a disastrous war with France at this juncture. King George is scarce settled on his throne, and so good an excuse would pave the way for the Stuarts' return."

"And Murray?"

"So ambitious a man as he must have his object in view. He could ask a dukedom—whatever he willed."

"Yes, that is true," I assented. "'Tis a dangerous plot."

Juggins looked at me keenly.

"You are still desirous to join in thwarting it?"

"More so than ever. But I see not how I can be of service to you."

"If the Lords of Trade have received the orders I expect, then you can be of great service to me and to your country. For myself, I stand in no worse plight than the loss of some small sums of money, which I can do without at need. My interest is impersonal, Master Harry, and 'tis because he knows it to be so that Murray attempted my life last night."

"Let me call him out," I urged impetuously.

Juggins laughed.

"Then would you climb Tower Hill in short order. No, lad, you are an humble 'prentice to Master Robert Juggins."

He rose.

"Come, you shall have your first lesson. You may attend me to the hearing before the Lords of Trade, and you shall carry me a bag of papers rather than a sword."

"But so I shall not aid you," I demurred.

"Aye, but you shall. I wish you to observe what passes at the hearing, and to study Murray. For if he wins his stay, as I fear he will, then it is my purpose to send you to New York for such evidence as will wreck his conspiracy."

"And I will go gladly," I said, a thrill of exultation in my heart at the bare thought of a man's part to play.

"I would I might go with you," sighed Juggins. "But I am old and fat, and granny can ill spare me. No, it calls for youth and strength. But a truce to talk. Let us to Whitehall."

He collected some documents and maps, placed them in a green string-bag and gave it to me to carry.

"And remember," he cautioned me at the door, "do you keep at least two paces behind me. Speak only when I speak to you and hold your head low and your shoulders stooped. Slouch, if you can. If any address you look stupidly at them and mumble an answer. I will explain that you are slow-witted."

But none of the men who stopped Master Juggins during our walk deigned to notice the humble 'prentice lad who followed him. I avoided all scrutiny and reached Whitehall with considerable more self-confidence than I had started with.

THE Lords of Trade sat in a lofty chamber of a dirty, gray stone building over against the river. At one end was a dais with a long, closed-in desk across it. Behind this nodded my lords in periwigged majesty, five of them, two fat and pompous, one small and bird-like, one tall and cadaverous and one who looked like nothing at all.

"That is Tom Pelham," whispered Master Juggins, pointing at the last as we took our seats.

But I had already transferred my gaze to an extraordinary creature who stood by a window on the opposite side of the room. It was a black man, squat and enormously broad, whose long, powerful arms reached almost to the floor. He had a square, woolly head, with little, pig-eyes that were studying the people in the room with a kind of animal cunning.

As I watched him, fascinated, his eyes

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found my face and he surveyed me, apparently without any human interest whatsoever, but as a wild beast might consider a fat stag when too full to care about a kill. He was dressed in a bright-red livery coat with gold lace, and the cocked hat which he held was covered with silver embroidery.

I felt Juggins tugging at my arm.

"Do you see him?" he whispered.

I shuddered involuntarily, whilst the beady, pig-eyes gloated over me.'

"I never saw anything so hideous in my life," I answered.

Juggins laughed, as his eyes followed mine.

"No, I meant not the negro. 'Twas Murray I spoke of. He sits several seats farther on."

I looked as directed and picked out a man who lounged back comfortably in a chair, talking with a group of merchants who seemed to hang on his words. He was elegantly clad, yet very quietly, rather in the fashion of a fine gentleman than a rich trader.

Though sitting, he showed himself to be a large man of massive frame. His face was dead-white in complexion, with big features, strongly marked. He wore an immense periwig in the prevailing mode, and there was about him an air of pride and self-confidence. Though he must have been middle-aged, he carried himself like a young man or a soldier.

"He is no enemy to be slighted," I said.

"No, he thrives upon opposition; but——"

A secretary rapped for order.

"To the King's Most Excellent Majesty in Council," he recited from a document he held, "the humble petition and representation of Samuel Baker, Samuel Storke, Richard Jeneway and others, merchants of London, trading to New York, in behalf of themselves and the rest of the persons concerned in the New York trade; which petition, having been considered by his Majesty's Council, hath been referred, with his gracious consent, to the Right Hon. the Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations."

"You will note," whispered Master Juggins in my ear, "that the name of Murray is not included in the list. That was the cleverest move he made. He appears here, not as the principal, which he is, but at the request of these merchants, who are his decoys, and ostensibly in their interest."

The secretary read on for some minutes, and then came to a stop, looking expectantly at their lordships, who promptly awoke from the naps they had been taking.

"You have heard the petition and reference of the Council read," gabbled Pelham in whining voice. "We will now hear arguments by the opposing sides. Who opens?"

There was some hesitation.

"If it pleases your lordships," spoke up a merchant in the group surrounding Murray, "we would have the opponents of the petition heard first."

"Be it so. Who appears against the petition?"

Master Juggins rose beside me. His arguments were substantially those he had used with me, bulwarked additionally by a mass of facts and statistics. He drew, too, upon several documents in the bag I carried, letters and statements from Governor Burnet of New York and other merchants of that province. When he sat down it seemed to me that no Englishman who thought of his own country's interest could resist the logic of his appeal.

There was a smattering of applause, and then the same merchant who had spoken before introduced Murray, with the remark that he had kindly consented to give his opinion, as he had recently come on a visit to London from the province of New York, where he was in residence.

"The gentleman who preceded me," began Murray, "and who, I am told, once spent some time in our province many years ago, is unfortunately laboring under a misapprehension of the situation. It is not, my lords, as though we had the misfortune to be at war with France. Through the grace of God, the two countries have now been for some years at peace with one another, and their subjects in the New World have striven not to be behind-hand in drawing closer the bonds of trade which in themselves are the best preventative of war."

"Hear, hear," cried his supporters.

"There is no difficulty about this subject which we are discussing," he resumed. "We manufacture in this country more goods of a certain kind than we can consume ourselves. These goods are in great demand amongst the savage tribes which inhabit the interior of North America.

"Both the French and our own traders have use for these goods in the fur-trade,

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which is growing to be of increasing worth to the London merchants. The French, by reason of their location on the shores of the Great Lakes, which stretch like inland seas across our wilderness, have access to the trade of many tribes which we do not reach.

"If we withhold from the French the goods they require for trading with these tribes they will seek them from the manufacturers of the Low Countries and Germany. Thus our merchants at home will be deprived of a profitable trade, and we provincials will not be bettered. Also, the supply of furs for the London market, much of which comes from the French posts, will be reduced. It seems to me, your lordships, that this prohibitory legislation will only have crippling effects upon trade and hinder the good relations between France and England and their colonies."

He said much more in the same vein, whilst Juggins twisted uneasily in his seat and the attending merchants and even their sleepy lordships hung upon his words. For he was a ready speaker. When he sat down there was hearty applause and Pelham nodded his head as if to say—

"Well done."

BUT our opponents were not through with us. The merchant who acted as master of ceremonies caused a start of surprize, in which I joined, by bringing forward a handsomely dressed gentleman, whose laced coat and gold-hilted sword showed conspicuously in such drab surroundings.

'Twas Raoul de Veulle; yes, Raoul de Veulle, whose mad exploits and escapades, love-affairs and gambling-debts, had kept all Paris gossiping these past three years and had just driven him into an exile, the facts concerning which had been mysteriously secret. I had known de Veulle well—as a dim star of restricted orbit may know a bright planetary light whose radiance reaches beyond his immediate universe. Once, in fact, we had come together, clashed over a question of honor in which— But I will tell of that in its place.

Now de Veulle stood before us, his handsome face smiling, bowing low before their interested lordships. In charming, broken English he repeated his brief message. He had been requested by his Excellency the French ambassador to appear in this matter in answer to a plea offered by the petitioners to the ambassador for corroborative testimony to the justice of their assertions from a responsible French source.

He himself—he shrugged apologetically—as it happened was Canadian-born; he was just starting upon his way to take up an appointment in the Canadian Government. He ventured to say he knew whereof he spoke. He agreed unhesitatingly with what Monsieur Murray had stated. On behalf of the French Government and of the Canadian authorities he begged to say that such legislation as New York wished to have perpetuated would have most unhealthy effects upon the trade and politics of their two countries. He thanked their lordships for their forbearance, made a second courtly bow and withdrew.

Master Juggins sprang to his feet, his honest face aflush.

"Many of the assertions of Master Murray and——"

Pelham waved him to his seat.

"We have heard enough," pronounced the whining voice. "You have no other first-hand witnesses from overseas?"

"No, your lordships," admitted Juggins reluctantly.

"Then further talk is fruitless," he went on, while his colleagues nodded their sleepy assent. "We are agreed that there seems to be some difference of opinion concerning this measure. Were it not for the fact that his Majesty's Governor of New York appears to favor the bill, we should consider the case made out against it unanswerable. But in view of Governor Burnet's approval we are resolved that the matter shall be referred back to him with a request for a full report upon the issues raised, and pending the receipt of this report and a decision being reached his Majesty's Government will not take action in the premises.

"Good relations with the Government of his Most Catholic Majesty must be preserved, and the utmost care should be maintained that no injustice be done, however unwittingly, to any of the subjects of the two countries.

"What is the next case for consideration?"

The petitioners, much gratified, flocked around Murray and his ape-like servant, and I followed Master Juggins from the chamber and out into Whitehall.

"The scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "But 'twas no more than I had expected."

"And what will happen next?" I asked.

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"If I know Governor Burnet as well as I think I do, Murray and his French friends will draw slight comfort from their triumph today."

"Why? What can he do?"

"Nothing official, 'tis true; but remember he is three thousand miles from London and therefore able to think for himself. With you to help him——"

I felt something brush against my coat sleeve and looked around. I had just time to see the back of a gaudy red coat and a woolly black head, crowned by an ornate cocked hat, disappearing in the crowd.

"Do you see?" I said.

"Aye," responded Juggins grimly; "I might have known it. Well, 'tis a lesson in time. We will not forget it."

CHAPTER IV

FIVE BERTHS ON THE *NEW VENTURE*

WE TURNED from Whitehall into the crowded Strand.

"Murray will figure that this delay gives him time to bribe and buy his will, either in Governor Burnet's Council or in the Government here," continued Master Juggins, with a watchful eye against the return of the spy. "At the worst he will think that he should be able to withstand the law's execution for several years, and in that time much may be done—aye, much may be done, and in more than one way," he concluded grimly.

"Then doubtless Murray will send at once a swift messenger to New York so that his friends may set to work in his interest," I suggested.

Juggins stopped sbruptly in the center of the footway.

"No, he will go himself. 'Tis too important for trusting to another. That was well thought of, Master Harry. We must not let him get ahead of us. You must sail on the first passage available. Do you follow me."

And he started off as fast as his legs could carry him, bumping and prodding his person against all who did not move from his path.

"Whither are we bound now?" I panted.

"To Master Lloyd's Coffee-House, where the ship-owners resort for trade. We shall find news of the sailings there."

We followed the Strand past Temple Bar into Fleet Street, and so trod a path into the labyrinth of the City—that congested hive of humanity whence the mighty energies of England radiated in a constant struggle for control of the world's arteries of trade. Used though I was to the busy life of Paris, I was amazed by the throngs of people hurrying to and fro, the concentration of effort that was everywhere visible, the numbers of different races represented on the sidewalks, the signs and letterings that hung over doorways and in windows, proclaiming the multiplicity of endeavors to which the merchants of the city were committed.

"Mark well what you see around you, Master Harry," Juggins instructed me. "London hath prospered under King George. Here are come traders out of Muscovy, Cathay, the further Indies, the Spanish Main, the country of the Moors, Turkey, our own Western Plantations. And here at last is Master Lloyd's Tavern."

Many men stood on the cobbles outside talking. The coffee-room and taproom also were filled. Master Juggins pushed his way through the shifting groups until he reached a burly, stout man who sat by himself at a table, sucking fragrant Mocha from a bowl.

"And what will you ha', Bob Juggins?" demanded the burly man in a sulky voice.

As he spoke he pushed the bowl of coffee from him and produced a dog-eared record-book, bound in filthy sheepskin, from a pocket in the skirts of his coat.

"A good afternoon to you, Tom Jenkins," returned Juggins. "You gentry are sitting late this afternoon."

"We ha' been making up the subscriptions for the Baltic Fleet," yawned the burly man.

"And how are sailings to the Western Plantations?"

"Ameriky?"

"Aye, New York province."

"From Bristol?"

Master Juggins hesitated, then shook his head.

"No, I must have an early passage," he decided. " 'Twould take too long to ride thither."

The burly man consulted his record-book.

"We ha' the ship *New Venture*, Abbot, master, sailing from Greenwich the end of the week—say, Saturday post meridian. What's your cargo?"

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" 'Tis not cargo, but a man I would send on her."

Master Jenkins shook his head foreboddingly.

"I fear me she's full up, Bob."

"How does that happen?"

"But yesterday we sold four places on her—and she hath limited quarters for passengers."

Juggins threw me a humorous glance.

"I'll be bound 'tis Master Murray of New York she's to carry," he declared.

"Why, that's true," admitted Jenkins. "And some Frenchy, a friend o' his."

I forgot my rôle of 'prentice lad, and shoved myself across the table.

"Not de Veulle? The Chevalier de Veulle?" I challenged him.

Jenkins looked at me with mingled amusement and indignation.

"Who's your green lad that hankers for the Frenchies so?" he asked Juggins.

My master sent me spinning to the floor.

"Mind your place, boy," he rebuked me.

Then he continued half-apologetically to Master Jenkins—

"This de Veulle put a slight upon me before the Lords of Trade, and the lad—'tis a good youth and devoted, though fresh come out of Dorset, as you may see—was most indignant on my behalf."

Jenkins blinked his eyes.

"Humph," said he.

"And now about the passage?" resumed Juggins. "I'll pay well. Sure, you can always find room for an extra man on shipboard."

"What will you pay?"

"Three guineas."

"Four," countered Jenkins in a monotonous tone.

"Four, then," agreed Juggins, "and may the extra guinea find a hole in your pocket."

THE ship-owner nodded dispassionately, and made an entry in his book.

"Four guineas," he repeated.

Juggins drew the coins from a purse and clinked them on the table.

"You'll never lose a debt, will you, Tom?"

"Not if I can help it," Tom agreed.

"And is it de Veulle sails with Murray?"

"Aye; he goes on some Government mission for Canada."

"But why does he not sail from Havre in a French ship for Quebec?"

"The St. Lawrence is frozen. There will be no French ships for Canada for two months yet."

Juggins pursed his lips in that quaint gesture of a whistle which was a characteristic trait.

"They use our goods," he muttered; "they use our rivers, our trading-posts, our people, the tribes which are friendly to us—and now they use our ships."

"Often," admitted Jenkins disinterestedly. "Since the Peace of Utrecht we ha' done a sight o' shipping business with the Frenchies."

" 'Tis to our shame," declared Master Juggins roundly.

"Why, 'tis business," answered Jenkins with his first show of interest. "Would you have a merchant reject the trade that came his way?"

"Aye, if 'twas not to his interest to accept it," rejoined Juggins.

"Show me a heathen, let alone a Frenchy, will pay a farthing more than an Englishman, and I'll show you a better customer," said the ship-owner. "Trade is trade. Leave politics to governments. If I make not my own living, will the gentry at Westminster carry my debts? I think not."

Juggins swelled with indignation.

"God help England when men like you come to rule it, Tom Jenkins!" he declared. "Good afternoon to you."

"One moment," interposed Jenkins. "You ha' not given me the name of my passenger."

"Must you have it?"

"Aye. How else shall I know whom to admit on board?"

" 'Tis this youth here."

"He who hath the interest in the Frenchy?" responded Jenkins. "Well, lad, keep your hands off him, despite his insults to your master. And what's your name?"

"Bill," I said in a voice I made as hoarse as I could.

"Bill," he repeated. " 'Tis a good plain name. But you must ha' more to it. So the custom officers will say."

" 'Tis Juggins," interposed my master. "The lad is a cousin once removed. He goes to seek employment in the New World. To tell the truth, though strong and willing, he is not overburdened with wits. But he can swing an ax as well as any one, and

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his muscles should bring him good hire on some wilderness farm."

"Aye," agreed Master Jenkins tonelessly.

He wrote the name carefully in his record-book, slipped it back in his coat-tails and returned to his bowl of Mocha. The sucking of his lips was the last sound I heard as we left the table.

In the street Juggins turned upon me indignantly.

"Would you ruin us, Master Harry?" he demanded. "Zooks, you were like to plunge yourself into trouble by your forward manner! I'll wager Tom Jenkins is wondering now whether you are a criminal or only a half-wit."

"Not he," I replied confidently. "He hath his four guineas, and a reasonable explanation for the receiving of it, and he will not worry about Government or the character of the man who paid him."

"Mayhap," said Juggins doubtfully. "But for your own sake, lad, mind the playing of your part till you have the Atlantic behind you. Why did you flare up over this de Veulle?"

"Because I know him."

This time 'twas Juggins who forgot our parts, for he stopped me in front of St. Paul's and grasped my arm.

"You know him? But——"

"I know him and I hate him," I answered doggedly.

"Why? What hath he done?"

"Oh, he owes me nothing. Like enough he thinks the obligation is the other way. He is one of the gallants of the Court in Paris. He came out of Canada some three years ago, and made a reputation for gambling, fickleness and daredeviltry of all kinds. I never had the money to mingle with him and his friends, but once in the Toison d'Or I heard him slur the poor young man I then served."

"James?"

"I called him King James in those days," I answered. "Yes, de Veulle was mocking the petty motley of our exiled Court, mocking it as much as anything else because he sought to humiliate the two Englishmen in the room.

" 'What is this King but a puppet figure for us to dandle in England's face?' he said. 'And what are his courtiers but other puppets to dress the show?'

"His toadies all laughed. They laughed so that they did not see the other Englishman and me rise in our seats.

" 'And the most comical thing of all,' ended de Veulle, 'is to think of this Puppet King, with a Puppet Court, ruling over a Puppet England while France pulls the strings—as will surely happen some day.'

"It was then I knocked him out of his chair."

Master Juggins gripped me by the hand with a warmth that surprized me.

"Good lad!" he exclaimed. "I would have done it myself!"

"What? You are no Jacobite!"

"I am no Jacobite," he replied in some confusion, "but no more were you a Jacobite when you struck him. 'Twas for England, Master Harry; and a man's country means more than any king that ever ruled. But what came after?"

"We fought in the upper room of the Toison d'Or—de Veulle and I and a friend of his and my friend. My friend was badly wounded."

"And you?"

"I disarmed my opponent."

"Only that?" remonstrated Juggins whimsically.

"Well, I disarmed him several times. When we began to fence I found he knew little of the small-sword—remember, he had been brought up in Canada—and 'twould not have been pretty to slay a man so at my mercy. Also, to treat him as I did was more humiliating to his pride than death."

"You did well, Master Harry. But granny will be awaiting us. We must hasten."

He walked in silence until we had reached the house in Holborn.

"HOW comes de Veulle in London?" he asked suddenly as we climbed the stairs.

"He was in some trouble in Paris—what, I know not. The rumor was that he was ordered into exile. But if he sails for Canada, as Master Jenkins says——"

"And on the same ship with Murray," interposed Juggins excitedly, "after appearing in Murray's behalf this afternoon——"

"—then there may be more to his enterprise than the mere punishment of exile from the Court," I concluded.

" 'Tis so!" exclaimed Juggins. "Beyond doubt 'tis so. Aye, Master Harry, this will be no ordinary struggle I send you upon. And mayhap de Veulle will recognize you."

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I struck him heavily on the shoulder.

"Do you think 'my father's son' will draw back on such excuse at this hour?" I said.

He laughed ruefully, and raised his hail for granny.

"Ho, Goody! Goody, hast lain abed all day? Here are two hungry forest-runners will eat your kitchen bare."

Granny tripped into the hall, a mug of bitter ale in either hand.

"I heard what you said, and Master Harry's answer," she rebuked him. "Think shame on yourself, Robert, to hint that he would hesitate before peril—and you sending him into it, too," she added somewhat illogically, I thought. "Now, do both of you drain these. 'Twill wash the taste of the streets and taverns from your mouths."

We obeyed her.

"And what luck did you have?" she demanded next.

"He leaves us Saturday," said Juggins simply.

She cried out.

"So soon! Must it be, Robert? Sure, the lad should have some respite from toil and fear!"

"If he is to go, he must go then," rejoined Juggins. " 'Twas because I felt as you did that I said what you heard, granny."

"And 'twas because he had a sound heart in him that he answered as he did," she snapped. "If he is to go, he should go, I dare say; and the greater the peril, the greater the reward. Now come with me. The meal is made ready."

She plied us with questions as we ate, demonstrating a keenness of mind that continually amazed me.

"So Master Murray hath engaged three berths on his own behalf, aside from the Frenchman," she commented. "Who could he have with him?"

"The negro servant," I hazarded.

"That is true," assented Juggins. "He is Tom, Murray's body-guard. An evil brute, by all accounts."

"But still there is a third place," insisted Granny.

"Another servant?" I suggested.

Juggins shook his head.

"I have had our men watched as well as may be, but never have we seen a trace of any other follower or servant."

"Have you done aught towards securing Master Harry's equipment?" she inquired.

"No," he answered. "The less he is cumbered with the better. All he needs for forest work he can find to better advantage in New York."

"But arms?" she pressed.

"There I have somewhat will be of aid to him," he agreed.

And he went to a cupboard, from which he produced a bundle of rolled cloths. Layer after layer was unwound, and finally he drew from the wrappings a gun such as I had never seen before. It was long in the barrel, well-stocked, yet very light and handy.

"You may exclaim over it, Master Harry," remarked Juggins as he surrendered it into my admiring hands; "but you can have no idea of its value until you have seen it tested in the great forests, where a man's life depends upon the swiftness and accuracy with which he can shoot. I learned that in my own youth, and so when I returned to London I had this gun made for me by the King's own gunsmith, after plans I drew for him. There is none other like it."

"And it is for me?" I asked, delighted as a child with a new toy.

"What better use could it have?" he replied. "Oh, yes; and these go with it."

He brought from the same cupboard a shot-pouch of beaded deerskin and a powder-horn, ornamented with dull silver that would not catch the light. Also a belt of hide from which there hung in sheaths a delicately balanced hatchet and a long, broad-bladed knife.

"These you will discover no less useful than the gun," he explained, drawing the weapons from their coverings. "This which you call a hatchet is the tomahawk of the Indians, used for fighting at close quarters and for throwing. This other is the scalping-knife, and a deadly blade it is, too. You will feel them strange at first, but among my friends in New York there is a Dutchman named Corlaer who will instruct you in the ways of the wilderness."

"You will not be letting Master Harry go upon his adventures without smoothing the path for him, will you, Robert?" interposed granny, looking up from the work-table by which she sat.

"No, indeed; he shall have letters to Governor Burnet himself, whom I met before he went overseas, and to Master Cadwalader Colden, the Governor's surveyor-general and a member of his Council, a fine,

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loyal gentleman with whom I have had some correspondence. They will see to him, more especially because he brings news of value to their plans; and he may be used to thwart the intrigues they struggle against."

CHAPTER V

THE FIFTH PASSENGER

GRANNY JUGGINS drew my face down to a level with her puckered old lips.

"God preserve you, Master Harry. No, I am not weeping. 'Tis— No matter. Remember always that so long as my heart beats there is room in it for you—and forget not that your mother would be hungry for pride in you if she were but with us."

She drew away anxiously.

"You do not mind that I say this, who was her servant?"

I swept her into my arms.

"I love you for it, granny. Never shall I forget your kindness and the welcome you gave to the stranger from the night."

She kissed me tenderly.

"I am an old woman, Master Harry," she said, "and I shall not live to see it; but the day will come when you will be no longer a fugitive from justice. So be not disheartened."

"And how could I be disheartened," I demanded, as I set her down, "with two friends such as I may boast of?"

There was a mist before my eyes, and I was not sorry when Juggins broke in upon our farewells.

"Come, come," says he. "You will be unmanning the lad, granny——"

" 'Tis to his credit he hath so much sentiment," she returned, wiping clear her eyes with a shaky hand. "But 'tis time he went, Robert."

"Aye, John Waterman will be waiting us at the Temple Stairs, and we have little time to spare if we are to get aboard before the other passengers. This de Veulle would recognize him, I fear, even in his disguise."

I could not forbear a grimace at the reference to my get-up, a linsey-woolsey shirt, with homespun jacket and breeches and a bobbed scratch-wig, the whole designed to give me a rustic appearance, which there can be no doubt that it did.

"Never mind, Master Harry," admonished Juggins as he clapped an ugly beaver of ancient style upon my head. "In New York you will rig yourself in forest-runner's garb, and forget that you ever played the bumpkin. Give granny a last kiss, and——"

She flew at me, light as a bird; her arms clasped momentarily about my neck; I felt her kiss on my cheek; and then she was gone from the room. I may as well say here that I never saw her again, although many a night as I lay under the stars I was to remember her quaint ways, her sweet, shrill voice and loving smile.

But I had no opportunity for such thoughts as Juggins and I hurried through the streets toward the river, where a wherry was awaiting us. All the way he kept up a running fire of last-minute advice and instructions.

"Guard well the letters I have given you, the one to Corlaer no less than those to Governor Burnet and Master Colden. Corlaer, though he be only a rude, unlettered woodsman, is none the less of importance in the wilderness country. He hath the confidence of the Indians of the Six Nations, a mighty tribe, or rather confederacy of tribes, Master Harry. They were recently but five nations in their league, but the Tuscaroras, after troubles with the colonists in the Carolinas, came north several years ago and were accepted at the Council-Fire at Onondaga."

"Are they friendly to Murray?" I asked as we reached the river and climbed aboard the wherry.

"Nay, I think not. But you will learn beyond question in New York. I have writ as strongly as a man may to Governor Burnet, but I would have you say to him all that you can think of to urge him to a vigorous course. 'Tis no hour for half-way measures. We must crush Murray once and for all. If legal measures may not suffice, then let us go without the bounds of the law."

We came presently to Greenwich reach, and steered a passage through the river traffic to the side of the *New Venture*, a slovenly craft of fair burthen, whose loose rope-ends and frazzled rigging emphasized the confusion on her decks.

Master Abbot, her captain, a melancholy man in a tar-stained coat, met us at the rail.

"The young man is not sure of himself afloat, and would seek his berth," said

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Master Juggins, after the preliminaries had been passed.

"As he pleases," agreed Captain Abbot indifferently. "Y'are the first aboard, lad, and may choose your quarters."

"What choice have I?"

"Why, you may bunk with the second mate or one of the other passengers. But no," he corrected himself; "I should have said with one of two of the other passengers. The lady hath a cabin to herself."

"The lady!" I exclaimed.

MASTER JUGGINS pursed his lips in a soundless whistle.

"So you carry a lady," he commented.

"Aye," replied Abbot, lapsing into his customary manner of indifference, "and a sore nuisance it is, too, although it makes but one in the cabin."

"Who is she?"

"I know not."

He turned to me.

"And now, young sir, what do you say? Will it be the second mate or a passenger for companion?"

"The second mate," I said.

He nodded his head, called a seaman to carry my luggage below and point the way, and walked off.

Master Juggins drew me back to the rail.

"'Tis best I should not wait," he said. "Stay below till you be safe out of Thames mouth, Master Harry. You should be safe enough now, but care is a sure precaution."

"I will not forget," I promised.

"And one thing more, lad. Do not stint your wants for money. Governor Burnet will aid you to draw whatever you may desire through the bankers in New York. Remember, you spend on my behalf. I would willingly use all I have to thwart Murray. You will require trade-goods for the savages, and perhaps equipment for yourself. Purchase the best. Spend—and spare not."

"You are too kind," I mumbled.

"Say rather your father was too kind. 'Tis little enough I have been able to do for you—sending you away, an exile, on a mission of danger. Yet I would have you look upon it as a privilege, if you will, Master Harry. When all is said and done, we are at war with France. 'Tis no war of generals and armies and admirals and fleets, I grant you. But war it is.

"True, there is the Peace of Utrecht, with all its ponderous provisions sullying so many square inches of white parchment. It proclaims peace. And nevertheless I say to you that we are at war."

He smote the rail with his hand by way of emphasis.

"What kind of a war?" I asked.

"Why, a war for the right to grow and to flourish, a war for trade. At other times, mark you, nations clash over questions of honor or territory. So their statesmen say. Actually there is a question of trade or merchantry at the bottom of every war that has been fought since the world began.

"The Romans crushed the Carthaginians—because they wanted another corner of Africa? Never! Because only by so doing could they make the Mediterranean a Roman lake and insure its control by their shipping.

"And so today we are fighting with France for control of the trade of the Atlantic—and control of the Atlantic trade means control of the Western Plantations, America. We are fighting, Master Harry, with laws and tariffs and manufacturing skill and shipping instead of with men and deadly weapons."

"What is the immediate stake for which we fight?" I questioned, interested as always when this extraordinary man unloosed himself in conversation.

"The fur-trade. The country which wins the fur-trade will win control over the greatest number of savages. And the country which is so placed, especially if it be England, will win the military struggle which some day will have to be fought for dominion in America. So I would have you feel yourself a soldier, a general of trade, sent out upon a venture of great danger and importance. It may be, Master Harry, that you carry on your shoulders the future of England and of nations yet unborn."

He fired me so that I forgot my clumsy garments and outward character. I felt, I think, as any young knight who rides forth upon a deed of errantry and adventure.

"All that I can, I will do!" I exclaimed.

"Good. I can not ask more."

He clasped my hand in a wringing grip.

"I see a wherry approaching from up-river. I had best be gone. Good luck to you, lad, and write as occasion serves."

He went over the side with his lips pursed as if to whistle and a look of doleful pleasure

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on his face. Him, too, as it happened, I was never to see again. In fact, I wonder whether I should not have leaped over the vessel's side at that moment had I realized how complete was to be the severance of my life from all that I had known before.

But I did not know. I walked away from the rail with a light heart, inspired by Master Juggins' parting words and the vision he had called up before my eyes. I cast only a casual glance at the approaching wherry, which was still too far off for me to observe whom she contained.

By the cabin entrance under the poop I found the seaman who had collected my scanty baggage, and he escorted me down the shallow stairs into a dark passage, which led to the main cabin, a room at the stern which ran the width of the ship and was lighted by three windows. It was mainly occupied by a table and four benches clamped to the deck. Off the passage itself, opened four doors, two on either side.

"Where do you berth?" the seaman asked me, pausing at the foot of the ladder-stairs.

"With the second mate."

He opened the first door on the right-hand, or starboard, side, revealing a space so tiny that I marveled how two men could force themselves into it at once. It was so low that I could not stand upright, so cramped that there was room only for one person outside the two short, shallow bunks which occupied two-thirds of its area.

"Do all the passengers lodge aft here?" I asked him carelessly as he disposed of my trappings.

"All save the negro; he is to sleep in the galley behind the companionway."

When he had gone I curled up in the lower bunk, which the second mate obviously had surrendered to me, and spent the remainder of the day in dozing and finishing off the shore-food Granny Juggins had prepared for my hours of seclusion. I listened long for the other passengers, but they kept the deck, probably watching the work of getting under way and taking a last look at the shores of England—as I should have liked to do myself.

I had not known my country much in recent years, and truth to tell she did not seem to care for me. None the less I loved the emerald-green countryside, the soft sunshine through low-hanging clouds, even the turgid reek of smoky, crowded old London.

At last I must have dozed, for I was awakened suddenly by the strangest of sounds—a woman's voice singing. Clear and true, the soprano notes came through the bulkhead at the foot of my bunk. It was a song I had never heard before, with a Scots accent to the words and a wonderful lilting melody that was somehow very sad all the while it was pretending to merriment. I had never been in Scotland—except for the sad venture of the '19; and that had left no pleasant memories, God knows—but the song set me to mourning for the heather-clad moors and the gray bens and the black lochs which its words lamented.

I ROSE from my bunk, and, stealing to the door, set it open, so that I might hear the better. The passage outside was empty, and the salt sea-air blew down the open companionway an occasional gust of talk. But I paid no attention to that.

I was so interested in the song and the singer's voice that I forgot even to watch the door of the cabin next to mine where she was singing. And judge of my surprize, as I leaned with my head bowed by the low lintel and my eyes fixed on the gently heaving deck, when the singer's door swung open and she stepped into the passage, almost at my side.

Her surprize, as was but natural, was greater than mine. So we stood there a moment within a long yard of each other, gazing mutely into each other's eyes. She was a slim, willowy lass, in a sea-green cloak that clung to her figure in the slight draft that eddied through the passage.

Her face, flower-white in the dim light that came down the companionway, had a sweetness of expression that belied the proud carriage of her head and an air of *hauteur* such as I had seen about the great ladies of King Louis' Court. Her hair was black and all blown in little wisps that curled at her forehead and neck. Her eyes were dark, too. Afterward I learned that they were of a dark brown that became black in moments of anger or excitement.

"I heard you singing," I said.

She turned and made to reenter her cabin. But I raised my hand involuntarily in a gesture of appeal.

"I am sorry," I went on quickly. "I did not mean to be rude. I—I could not help it."

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She regarded me gravely, evidently puzzled by the incongruousness of my voice and my plowboy garments.

"You are never Scots, sir?" she answered finally.

"No, but I know Scotland."

A light dawned in her eyes with the words.

"Ah, then you will be knowing the song that I sang! 'Lochaber No More' 'tis called, and a bitter lament of exiles out of their own homeland."

"No, I never heard it before—but I have a brother buried on a hillside far north of Lochaber, in the Clan Donald country."

The sorrow that came into her face was beautiful to see. None but a person who had Gaelic blood could have sympathized so instantly and so generously with a stranger's grief.

"That will have been the great sadness upon you," she cried in the odd way that the Highland Scots have of using English. "Oh, sir, your wo will have been deep! So far from his own home!"

"Yes," I assented; "and he an exile, too."

In that moment I felt for the last time all the old raging hatred of the Hanoverian usurper, the hatred that springs from blood spilled and unavenged; and even though the reason within me stilled the tempest that memory had stirred, I knew, or something within me knew, that I never could be happy under the immediate rule of King George.

"An exile!"

She leaned toward me, her eyes like stars.

"You will be one of the Good People!"

I did not answer her, too confused in my wits to know what to say; and suddenly my confusion spread to her.

"It is wild I am talking, sir!" she exclaimed. "Never heed my words. Sure, who would be trusting his heart's blood to the stranger that stepped in his path?"

"I think I would trust mine to you," I answered boldly.

She smiled faintly.

"From your manner you would be no Englishman, sir, saying such pretty things without consideration."

"I have been long out of England."

"Then your sorrow will not be so great for parting with all you have held dear. Lucky is your lot."

"You have never been to America?" I asked.

"I had never been out of Scotland until I came south to take ship today. Ah, sir, there is a great sorrow at my heart for the country I love."

We said nothing while you might have counted ten, and in the silence she looked away from me.

"I hope you will sing often," I said fatuously.

"I sing as the feeling comes to me," she retorted.

She gathered her cloak around her, and shut her cabin door.

"And you go with us to New York?" I asked—no less fatuously.

Her eyes danced with a glint of humor.

"Pray, sir, will there be any other stopping-place in the ocean?"

I laughed.

"My name," I began—and then I stopped abruptly.

My name at present was William Juggins, and I had a feeling of reluctance at practising deceit upon this girl at our first meeting. But she saved me from my quandary.

"You will not be what you might seem, sir," she said gravely. "That I can see, and perhaps you will not think me indiscreet if I say so much."

"'Tis true," I assented eagerly. "Indeed——"

"But you will be meeting my—" she hesitated ever so little—"my father presently no doubt, and he will make us known to one another. Now I must go on deck."

And she walked by me with a faint swish of skirts that sounded like an echo of far-off fairy music.

Her father! Who could he be? And then realization smote me.

Plainly, she could not be de Veulle's daughter—nor Captain Abbot's. She was Murray's.

I went back into my cabin and shut the door, feeling not altogether satisfied, despite the fragrance of her person which still lingered in my nostrils, the recollection of her dainty charm, the indefinable tone of high breeding which had emanated from her.

Murray's daughter! I rebelled against the idea. It could not be. It ought not to be. What right had he to a daughter—and such a maid as this? 'Twas absurd! Manifestly absurd!

Why, I must hate the man. I had no other recourse. And he had a daughter! And above all this daughter!

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CHAPTER VI

THE OPENING OF HOSTILITIES

WHEN I came on deçk the next morning we were driving down-channel before a smart northwest wind. The sky was blue overhead; the low rollers were just capped with foam; the air was clean and tangy; the brownish, salt-stained canvas shone in the sunlight; the cordage hummed and droned.

Murray stood by the weather rail with the negro, Tom, at his elbow. As I emerged from the companionway Tom leaned forward and whispered something to his master. Murray walked straight across the deck to my side, his eyes fastened upon my face.

"How now, Master Juggins," he said heartily, his hand outstretched, "and did you leave your good uncle—or is it cousin?—well?"

I perceived that he took me for the lout I was dressed to represent, and strove to play up to the disguise.

"Well enough, sir," I answered sullenly, shifting clownishly from foot to foot.

" 'Tis good!" he exclaimed. "Faith I am vastly relieved. I have a warm regard for honest Robert Juggins. He has spoken of me, perhaps?"

The question, designed to catch my simple mentality unawares, gave me considerable amusement.

"Oh, aye," I muttered.

"We have been rivals in our ventures, as you doubtless know," continued Murray, taking a pinch of snuff in a manner which the Duc d'Orléans might have envied.

"But he doesn't take it seriously, sir," I assured him gravely.

"Eh? What's that?"

"He laughs about it, sir."

And I goggled at him stupidly. After a moment's inspection of my countenance he seemed constrained to accept the remark as witless innocence, for a grim light of humor appeared in his eyes.

"Laughs, does he? Zooks, I might have known it. He is a merry soul, Robert Juggins, and I should like to see him footing a morris to a right merry tune. Mayhap we shall see it some day. Who knows?"

"Who knows, sir?" I repeated vacantly.

"And you are to cast your fortunes in America, lad?" he resumed.

"Oh, aye, sir."

"What I might have expected from a fine, upstanding young fellow," he applauded me. "We need many of your like. You may count upon my good offices in New York. Faith, I shall be glad to do a favor if I can, for Robert Juggins' nephew—or did you say cousin?"

"I am——"

But he saved me from the lie.

"Ah, here is come one of our fellow passengers," he interrupted.

I turned to see de Veulle approaching us.

" 'Tis a French gentleman," pursued Murray, bent upon winning my confidence with his easy manners and glib tongue, "on his way to Canada. He can tell you rare tales of the wilderness and the savages. Ha, *chevalier*, meet a young countryman of mine. Such is the timber we use to exploit the new plantations. Master Juggins—the Chevalier de Veulle."

All unsuspecting, de Veulle made me a slight bow, a look of indifferent disdain in his face at sight of my plebeian figure. The disguise was good, and I hoped I might cozen him for a time at least. But no man forgets another who has toyed with his life, and his indifference was dissipated the instant his eye met mine.

"Juggins?" he exclaimed in bewilderment. "You said Juggins, Monsieur Murray?"

"Sure, 'tis so," returned Murray urbanely. "Not our friend, the doughty trader, you understand, but——"

"*Parbleu!*" swore de Veulle. "This man is no more named Juggins than I am!"

In his excitement his English, which was broken enough at best, became almost incoherent. Murray favored me with a brief glance of supsicion.

"Who then?" he demanded.

"Ormerod! 'Tis Harry Ormerod, the Jacobite refugee!"

Murray snapped his fingers to Tom, the negro, who had been a silent witness to our conversation. In an instant he stood beside us, his baleful yellow eyes glaring at me.

"Is this the man who came with Master Juggins to the hearing before the Lords of Trade?" snapped Murray.

"He de man, massa," Tom answered in a husky voice that had a snarl in it.

"You are sure?"

"Yes, massa."

"Tom doesn't make mistakes," remarked Murray with a gesture of dismissal to the negro. "May I ask who you are, sir?" he addressed me.

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"I suppose you may," I replied coolly; and with a sense of relief I ripped the bobbed scratch-wig off my head and tossed it into the sea. "Does that help you at all?" I inquired of de Veulle.

He stared back at me, his face all drawn with hatred.

"I knew you with it on," he said savagely. "It became you. Why should a deserter wear the clothes of a gentleman?"

I laughed at him, but Murray intervened quickly.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

De Veulle made a gesture of disgust in my direction.

"This person, who was in the immediate entourage of the Pretender, abandoned his leader not long ago and fled to England to seek a pardon, repudiated and detested by all honorable men in Paris. But in England his protestations of loyalty were refused, for they naturally doubted the sincerity of one who wearied so soon of an unfortunate cause."

"Is this true?" Murray asked me.

"Within reason," I said.

MURRAY stared from one to the other of us. Plainly he was whimsically amused by our altercation.

"Stap me, but I rejoice to see that we may look forward to an entertaining voyage!" he exclaimed. "I had feared 'twould be most tedious. Are you seeking satisfaction from the gentleman, *chevalier?*"

"I shall fight him when I choose, on ground of my own choosing," replied de Veulle curtly.

"And by no means with small-swords," I jeered.

He gave me a black look.

"You will pray me to kill you if you ever fall into my power, Ormerod. I can wait until then."

"As you please."

He turned and left us. Murray took snuff very deliberately, first offering the box to me—which he had not done before—and scrutinized me politely from head to foot.

"I fear I have been patronizing in my conduct, sir," he observed. "Pray accept my apologies."

"You are most kind," I said ironically.

"'Twas a perfect disguise," he went on. "And your manner, if I may say so, was well conceived."

"I thank you."

"In short, I find you an opponent of totally different importance. You are an opponent?" he shot at me.

"Sure, sir, that is for you to say," I made answer. "So far as I know at this time we merely happen to be passengers together on this craft."

He laughed.

"I might have known it!" he exclaimed. "'Twas not like Juggins to send a bumpkin to Burnet. He hath been an enemy I might not scorn at any moment. And for a mere merchant he hath extraordinary spirit."

This was said with an air of condescension which irked me.

"You, sir," I remarked, "are no less a merchant. Why pretend to gentrice?"

A remarkable change came over the man. He ceased from tapping on his snuff-box. A wave of color suffused his face and neck; his eyes flashed. He straightened his back and shoulders and frowned upon me.

"Pretend—gentrice!" he rasped. "Sir, you are insulting. I have the blood of kings in my veins. I am of the Murrays of Cobbielaw. I quarter my arms with the Keiths, the Humes, the Morays—with every great family of Scotland. My grandfather four times removed was James V.

"I pretend to gentrice! I tell you there are few families in Europe can boast my lineage."

"It hath a Jacobite color to it," I could not resist observing.

He cooled rapidly at this, and the broad Scots accent which had crept into his speech soon disappeared.

"That is easily said—and easier disproved," he returned. "For myself, there is no more loyal adherent of King George, as you are likely to learn, sir, if you plan to backslide in the Pretender's interest when you reach New York. We provincials may be distant many thousands of miles from Court, but we are none the less careful in our devotion to the sovereign."

"So I have been told," I said dryly. "As for Master Juggins, his grandfather was steward to my father, and still I think him as much entitled to respect as any man, noble or common, who can prattle of sixteen quarterings. Family, sir, is not the more creditable for being talked about."

Murray laughed harshly.

"You have a sour tongue, young sir. I say to you plainly that if 'twere in my interest

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I might make things uncomfortable for you here. We may yet sight a King's ship."

It was my turn to laugh.

"When that time comes, we will attend to it. I thank you for warning me in advance."

He pocketed his snuff-box, swung around on his heel and strode off across the deck; but he had not reached the mainmast when he seemed to change his intent and returned to my side.

"Master Ormerod," he said, "I was in error to speak as I did of your friend, I crave your pardon."

He spoke so simply and unaffectedly as to take my breath away. There was naught for me to do but accept the apology in the spirit apparently intended.

"Sure, sir," I replied, "let us forget what hath passed."

"Willingly," he agreed. "There is enough contention, without belittling the most sacred thing in the world by needless bickering."

"And what is the most sacred thing in the world?" I asked.

"Good blood," he said quite straightforwardly. "But I must go below now. I have some papers to attend to. And I shall also attempt to induce the Chevalier de Veulle to preserve the amenities of life whilst we are restricted to such confined quarters."

"He shall not have to labor against my hostility," I promised as he departed.

Despite myself, I was taken with the man. His queer vanity, his unmistakable breeding, his ready wit, the assurance of power and self-sufficiency which radiated from him and explained, as I thought, his readiness to admit himself in the wrong, all these joined to inspire respect for his parts, if not admiration for his character.

DURING the rest of that day I made myself at home about the ship, talking with the seamen and their officers and watching vainly for the lady of the green cloak who had awakened me with her song. But she kept her cabin until the second afternoon, when we were sailing easily with a fair wind abeam. I found her then as I returned from a walk forward, standing with her hand on the poop-railing to steady her.

"I fear you are a poor sailor," I called to her.

She inclined her head for answer.

"Well, I have met your father," I said, coming to her side, "and I make no doubt he would present me were he here, so——"

"Sir," she said stiffly, "I have no desire for your company."

I stared at her, mouth agape.

"If I have offended—" I began.

"I may as well tell you," she interrupted me again, "that I have no personal liking or disliking for anything you have said or done in my presence. But I have heard that about you which will make me have no inclination for your company."

"And I shall ask you to tell me what that is," I retorted with mounting indignation. "It is not fair that you should accept the slurs of an enemy behind my back."

She hesitated.

"That may be so," she admitted, "but you will be willing to answer me two questions?"

"Surely."

"You are Captain Ormerod, formerly chamberlain to King James III?"

"Yes."

"And you not long ago abandoned the King's service and fruitlessly sought a pardon in London?"

"Yes."

I can not very well describe the scorn of voice and manner with which she addressed me.

"That is enough for me," she said. "You are a traitor, a deserter, proven out of your own mouth."

"But——"

"No, sir; there is naught you can say would interest me. I should despise you none the less had you deserted in the same circumstances to my own side. It makes it no less culpable that you deserted from my side because our fortunes were at low ebb. And indeed I think it will be a sure sign there is a God in heaven that such a black traitor as you will be, should be scorned even by the wicked men of the usurper in London."

"But you shall hear me," I protested. "This is absurd, what you say. You have taken two bare statements of fact and twisted into them the implications skilfully made by a personal enemy. You——"

"Last night, sir," she said cuttingly, withdrawing the folds of her cloak so that they might not touch me, "you played upon my sympathies with your tale of exile and a

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brother buried in the Clan Donald country, and I was all for sympathy with you and sorrow for your sorrow. You as much as told me you were one of the Good People. You let me deceive myself, after you had deceived me first. Oh, you will have acted unspeakably!"

"What I told you was true!"

"It could never have been."

"I swear it was. I was out in the '19; I fled to Scotland with my brother; he died and was buried there; I escaped with the remnants of the expedition; I am an exile at this moment."

"An exile! Phaugh! Think on the honest men can truly say that in their misfortune this day! And you— I could weep for the shame that your dead brother and the mother that bore you will be feeling as they look down upon you!"

With that she was gone, and I was left cursing—cursing de Veulle, whose treacherous tongue had planted the distorted shreds of truth in her mind; cursing Murray, who must have stood by and listened to it all, smugly amused; cursing my cousin who had put me in such a plight, after winning my inheritance; cursing the men and women at St. Germain who repaid years of sacrifice and ungrudging loyalty with such canards; cursing Juggins for having embarked me upon this ship with the girl; cursing myself for getting into such a false position; cursing the girl——

But no. Common sense came to my rescue then. There was something unaccountably fine about her attitude, something I should never have thought to uncover in Murray's daughter, however beautiful and attractive she might be. There was devotion for you, faithfulness to a lost cause, the single-minded truthfulness which only a good woman can possess.

Her indignation was the index to her personality. By it I might know that she was really worth while, that to win her respect must be an achievement for any man.

And that brought a new thought into my mind. Could the two men she was with have her respect? Could she respect her father, Murray? Aye, perhaps; for if he labored secretly in the Jacobite interest she, with her flaming, misdirected loyalty to the Stuarts, would excuse his deceptions and crimes, if only they brought back her King to the throne.

I was familiar with the way men and women of her persuasion ignored the well-being of their country, apart from their King. They could see no difference between the two. What did it matter if France profited by the issue, so long as James replaced George?

This brought me to de Veulle. Surely she could not respect him! If she knew what I knew— But manifestly she, who had never been out of Scotland before, could know nothing of his career in Paris.

And he had a way with him, there could be no denial of that. He was a handsome devil, with the *flair* which appeals to all women, good and bad. Aye, he might win her regard for a time; but I was prepared to stake all that she would unmask him in the end.

The twilight faded rapidly, and I found myself with no appetite for the crowded main cabin, where de Veulle and Murray played piquet, or my stuffy berth. I strolled the deck, immersed in thought. There was so much to think about. The episode with this girl, whose name even I did not know, had brought into vivid opposition the events of the past and the uncertain future which lay before me.

I conned over what Juggins had told me, memorized anew many of the messages he had entrusted to me, speculated upon the possible turn of affairs. I planned in some vague way to win a fortune in that unknown New World ahead of me, and with the proceeds in one hand and a pardon in the other, return and reclaim Foxcroft from those abominable Hampshire cousins.

With chin cupped in hand I leaned upon the starboard rail in the black well of shadow which was formed by the overhang of the forecastle, and the towering piles of canvas that clothed the foremast. Somewhere beyond the wastes of watery darkness that veiled my eyes lay England, the home which had disowned me. I——

WITHOUT any warning a huge arm was twisted around my shoulders and a hand so huge that my teeth could make no impression in it was clamped down over my mouth. Another arm encircled my waist. My arms were pinned to my sides. My legs kicked feebly at a muscular body which pressed me against the bulwark. Fighting back with all my strength, I was nevertheless lifted

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gradually from the deck and shoved slowly across the flat level of the fife-rail.

Do what I might, I could not resist the pressure of those tremendous arms which seemed to have a reach and a power twice those of my own. I gasped for breath as they squeezed my lungs—and in gasping I sensed a queer taint in the air, a musky odor which I did not at once associate with the seamen or any one else on board the ship.

It was no use. I could not resist. The snakelike arms mastered me. One shifted swiftly to a grip on my legs. I was whirled into the air and dropped clear of the railing —falling, falling, until the cold waters engulfed me.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE AZTEC TOPAZ

by WALTER A DYER

THE LEGEND OF CHAL

TWO MEN and women of sensitive imagination there come times—perhaps on a quiet Sabbath evening after the church-bells have ceased ringing, perhaps toward dusk of a gray November afternoon—when a strange, inexplicable sense of unreality seems to hover in the air and to oppress the spirit. In the very midst of our modern, workaday world, so practical, so concrete, so palpable, so unquestioned, there come moments when a veil of mystery obscures the sun, and our ears, attuned to the sounds of every day, become oddly sensitive to vague and foreboding echoes of some remote past. There are even actual events—rare, to be sure—which have the effect of dimming for a time the light of our familiar surroundings and casting about us an atmosphere of ancient beliefs, ancient sorceries, ancient perils, and the life of other peoples and other climes.

Nothing could be more plainly and simply a thing of today than the little town of Moreham, Maine. It has its tea-room, its feed and grain store, its antique shop. It has its modern library, its telephones, its electric-lighting plant on the shores of Swift River. It has its familiar Main Street and the estates of its Summer residents on the outlying hills. It has its two trains a day from Bangor, bringing the mail and the newspapers.

Its people think in terms of today and discuss politics and crops and local business and neighborhood gossip as they do in a thousand other New England villages. Yet one day there came to Moreham a whisper from ancient Yucatan with its blood feuds and its religious mysteries.

This is a tale of modern Moreham, but let me first give you the legend of Chal of Yucatan as it has lately been reconstructed by Adaskin, the curio dealer on Main Street, from data secured by him after the strange sailor appeared in Moreham and the remarkable events took place that for a time threw the quiet little town quite off its mental balance.

Travelers tell us that the peninsula of

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Yucatan is a sordid enough place today. Few travelers indeed care to penetrate very deeply into its poverty-stricken interior. It is inhabited chiefly by ignorant, dirty, hopeless Indian peons and their arrogant Mexican overseers who represent wealthy absentee proprietors. There are no fine cities to visit in Yucatan, no clean beds, no places to obtain decent food. No wonder that it is generally avoided save by adventurers and those unreasonable beings who would go anywhere in quest of a rare orchid or butterfly.

Both of these are to be found in Yucatan, and more. In the dismal interior, often hidden in a tangle of jungle, there await the stout-hearted explorer and archeologist remnants of a civilization which flourished before Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain in his caravels.

There once dwelt the ancestors of these same degenerate peons. There they built cities, fought wars, worshiped their gods, lived and loved and died. And there still remain the crumbling ruins of their cities and tombs and temples, rusty weapons of war and the chase, bits of antique pottery, and sculptured inscriptions which few living men can decipher, buried in the mold of centuries, deep in the heart of the jungle. There still exist among the inland tribes half-forgotten traditions of priesthood and the remnants of ancient superstitions and loyalties and hatreds.

NOW this is the legend that Adaskin tells of that age-old people. Once upon a time—no man knows just when—there dwelt in Yucatan a youthful king whose father and grandsire, recently killed in battle, had bequeathed to him a broad but unquiet realm. His name was Tapultepec, and he loved the Aztec maiden Makra, the beautiful daughter of the priest Taxon.

Now Makra had a devoted dog named Chal. Adaskin, who is a lover of dogs, will tell you that dogs and men have dwelt together since the beginning of time and that dogs were not uncommon among the ancient Aztecs—that the bones of dogs have been discovered beside the crumbling bones of men in Yucatan, just as they have been discovered in parts of Europe that were inhabited by prehistoric cave-dwellers; and that the Aztecs sculptured rude likenesses of dogs in basrelief as did the Assyrians and Egyptians.

One day Makra was attacked by a panther—the details of the legend are scanty—and was saved by her dog Chal. Tapultepec found them at the edge of the jungle, the maiden in a swoon but unhurt, the dog alive though torn and bleeding, and the panther stretched out dead beside them.

He bore them to the royal house and with his own hands bound up the wounds of Chal. And he caused the cleverest artificers of his tribe to fashion a jewel which was also a charm. This he hung by a copper chain about Chal's neck, and the inscription engraved upon it was designed to cast a malignant spell upon whosoever should raise hand or foot to do the dog harm.

Regrettably the legend fails to tell how it fared with the lovers, but a feud arose over the maid Makra and one day the dog Chal was slain in cold blood and the charm stolen. From that time on misfortune began to befall the enemies of King Tapultepec—madness, blindness, sudden death—until at last they buried the jewel beneath a great block of granite and set a priest to perform a monthly sacrifice thereon to propitiate the devil of the charm.

Time passed and generation succeeded generation. The origin and significance of the thing hidden under the stone became blurred in the minds of men, but the family of the priest passed the tradition down from father to son, and though the charm continued to bring misfortune upon the family each male member, as he reached maturity, took an oath to protect it with his life, no matter into what perils it might lead him.

This, I say, is the tale which Adaskin reconstructed from the data which he gathered and with the help of an eminent archeologist in Baltimore. For ordinary men, not having Adaskin's *flair* for the antique, it might have but little interest were it not for the strange and terrible things that happened in modern Moreham.

II

THE MURDER ON THE LETCHWORTH ROAD

IT WAS a quiet August morning in Moreham. The Bangor train had come and gone, and the village hack was returning leisurely from a fruitless trip to the station.

In the post-office the mail was being sorted, and half a dozen familiar figures were

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strolling thither along Main Street. The day promised to be warm and no one was inclined to hurry.

Hiram Bigelow, with sleeves rolled up over his fat arms, stood in the doorway of his meat-market and shouted bantering pleasantries across to two men who loafed in tipped-back chairs on the shaded porch of the Moreham House. Lawyer Martin's buggy stood in front of the Evans Block, the horse evidently sound asleep between the shafts.

Indeed, the only really alert-looking individual in sight was a dog that came around a corner from somewhere and trotted along the sidewalk as if he knew exactly where he was going. He was a handsome, spirited young animal—an Airedale terrier—with a crisp coat, rich mahogany-colored legs, and a glossy black saddle. His eyes were bright, his ears half-cocked, his tail erect, and a pink tongue hung half out of his mouth. He stopped abruptly in front of one of the stores and scratched on the screen door.

There was no sign above this door, but a mixed collection of old furniture, fabrics, clocks, silver, and porcelain in the window proclaimed it an antique-shop. The door was pushed open by a man of middle age and slight figure whose most noticeable features were a high forehead accentuated by a partially bald head, and a benignant expression of countenance. One would have marked him for a Yankee like his neighbors but for a certain cast of features which bespoke Semitic blood.

A closer inspection would have revealed spiritual and intellectual qualities in his face which might not have been expected from his environment. For this was Adaskin, far less a tradesman than a philosopher and scholar, who was widely known outside the confines of Moreham for the wealth of his antiquarian lore and the almost uncanny accuracy of his expert judgment.

Adaskin's face lighted with an extraordinarily sweet smile as he gazed down through horn-rimmed spectacles at the dog, who returned the smile with a waving tail.

"Come in, Ginger," said Adaskin. "Where have you been all the morning? I suppose you've come in to snooze through the heat of the day. Prudent dog."

Ginger trotted in past his master and to the back of the shop where he took a long, noisy drink from the pewter porringer that was his private water-bowl. Then instead of seeking his bed under the counter he came back to Adaskin and sat up on his haunches.

Adaskin, whose mind was engaged with one of the many problems of his profession, patted him absent-mindedly on the head and passed on to his desk. Adaskin sat down and took up some papers.

Ginger planted himself beside him. His steady gaze was disconcerting and drew Adaskin's eyes. Ginger stood up, crouched back, gave a premonitory growl and then a short, resonant bark.

"Hush, Ginger," commanded Adaskin. "What in the world is the matter with you?"

Ginger pranced off a few steps and then stood looking back invitingly.

"Now, Ginger, stop your nonsense. I'm very busy. I can't go for a walk with you this time of day and you know it perfectly well. Now, go lie down and keep cool."

Ginger's face and whole body assumed a tragic expression of bitter disappointment. He obeyed, strolling disconsolately to his bed under the counter, but he continued to peer out at his master with bright, half-hopeful eyes.

FOR a time the silence in the shop remained unbroken save for Ginger's occasional sighs, the rattling of Adaskin's papers and the ticking of many clocks. Then a tall clock toward the front of the shop began its silvery chime.

The screen door was drawn violently open and swung to with a bang. Ginger leaped up excitedly. Adaskin raised his eyes and beheld approaching between the rows of antique furniture the burly figure of Jake Waters, the Sheriff of Moreham County.

Jake was manifestly agitated. He was red-faced and hatless, and he swept the drops of perspiration from his glowing brow with a trembling hand.

"Adaskin," he cried in a hoarse voice, "what do you think has happened now? A murder on the Letchworth Road. A murder, Adaskin!"

"A murder? You can't mean it, Jake. So near Moreham? Who— What— Why, Jake, this is terrible."

"It's so, Adaskin. I'm all busted up about it and I need your help. The first murder ever committed in Moreham County, and nobody knows the dead man or who the murderer could have been."

"Was he shot, Jake?"

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"No; stabbed. Stabbed in the back. Tom Wilson's boy Frank found him early this morning lying on his face in the road. Thought he was drunk and tried to wake him up. Saw some blood and got frightened and ran home and told his father. Tom phoned me and I called up Doctor Blanchard. The coroner, you know.

"We found the body lying just as young Frank had said. Blanchard has it in charge now. I've got to do something about it, and there isn't a clue. Not even plain footprints in the dust. What can I do, Adaskin?"

"Can you describe the dead man, Jake?"

"Sure. Blanchard and I both think he was a sailor, though he had on ordinary store clothes. New suit, a cheap one, dark gray, bought in a store in Portland. New shoes; soft shirt. Beside the road was a black felt hat. That came from Portland, too. It was pretty dirty but seemed to be new.

"He was a short, stocky, broad-chested man with a beefy kind of face and heavy hands. Skin tanned brown. Had an anchor and three stars tattooed on his left forearm. Scar on his left cheek.

"Nothing in his pockets to identify him; only a pipe and plug of tobacco, some matches and toothpicks, a clasp-knife with a ship carved on the handle, and about twenty dollars in small bills and silver."

Adaskin nodded.

"I've seen the man," he announced quietly.

"You've seen him?"

"At least, your description exactly fits a man I have seen. Let's have a look at him, and then I can be sure."

Adaskin found his hat, and Ginger, in the belief that his entreaties had at last proved effective, dashed out of the shop. The two men followed. At the door Adaskin paused.

"Just a moment, Jake," said he. "Under the circumstances I think I should take certain precautions."

He returned to his desk and took from a drawer a small box made of some sort of straw mosaic. Removing the cover, he disclosed within an object upon which he stood gazing for a few minutes in silent contemplation. It was a flat, oblong bit of gold work, dark with age, somewhat over two inches in length and with a ring at one end which suggested that it might have been hung from a chain or ribbon like a locket.

In the center, set with marvelous skill, was a cut gem of oval shape, about half an inch long, which Adaskin had already identified as a rare and unusual sort of topaz. It was yellow, but a yellow that suggested orange in its depths. It was like clear amber suffused with blood, and it glowed and burned like the baleful eye of a basilisk.

The surface of the gold surrounding the topaz was engraved in an intricate pattern which appeared to be not so much a decorative design as as sort of inscription of unknown significance, though Adaskin could decipher nothing in the way of letters or characters, either Sanskrit, Arabic, or Chinese. The wonderfully wrought tooling seemed rather to suggest hieroglyphics or picture writing. Adaskin shook his head as if baffled by it, then closed the box and locked it in his safe.

"All right," he said as he rejoined Waters and the importunate Ginger.

He locked the door of his shop and hung up his "Back at Noon" sign. They walked rapidly and in silence until they had left the more populous portion of the town behind them. Then the sheriff spoke.

"Now, tell me, Adaskin, when did you see this fellow, and where?"

III

THE UNKNOWN SAILOR

ADASKIN whistled to Ginger, who was inclined to range too far ahead, and then began his narrative.

"If it's the one I think it is, it was only yesterday. And, Jake, there's something very strange about it all. Yesterday afternoon a man who tallied with your description in every respect came into my shop. Ginger and I were alone there at the time.

"I noticed something queer about him from the first. He looked furtively over his shoulder as he came in, and then he glanced about the shop as if to determined whether or not we were alone. His gait as he came toward me was that of a seaman, and his voice was gruff.

" 'You're Adaskin, I take it,' he said.

"I admitted the fact and he came close and tried to lower his voice to a confidential tone.

" 'You buy old curios,' he went on. 'Know a lot about 'em, what they're worth and all that.'

"I merely nodded. Then, glancing over

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his shoulder again, he pulled a small box from his pocket.

" 'How much will you give me for this?' he asked.

"I took the box and opened it. It contained an antique gem that I'll tell you more about at some future time. I don't know just what it is myself yet. It is unquestionably very old, beautiful and of wonderful workmanship, and unquestionably of great value.

"I would have thought it might be some Oriental talisman which the sailor had stumbled upon in his travels, and might have considered making him an offer for it if it had not been for his furtive manner. He was obviously nervous and anxious to get the business over with, but I was not in such a hurry. We can't be too cautious in my line of business. Stolen goods and that sort of thing, you know.

"I had been suspicious of him from the start, and so had Ginger—I could see that—and Ginger's instinct is generally to be relied upon in such cases, I find.

"I made a pretense of examining and appraising the jewel under my magnifying-glass while I turned the matter over in my mind. I had no intention of buying the thing myself under these circumstances, but if it should prove to be stolen property I wanted to learn as much as possible about it. It wouldn't do to refuse it and simply turn him loose with it to take it to some less scrupulous dealer. Inquiries might reach me almost any time. I resolved to keep the jewel in my possession as long as possible.

" 'This is a most unusual thing,' I said quite truthfully. 'I have never happened to see anything just like it before. What part of the world did it come from?'

" 'Ceylon,' he answered promptly. 'It was like this. Some years ago I was servin' as second mate on the steamer *Hingham* in the India and South Seas trade. We got caught in a bad storm off the coast of Ceylon and put in at a small port for repairs. Most of us got shore-leave, and to pass the time I went cruisin' out around the outskirts of the town. Dirty spot it was, and hot. I didn't find much to take pleasure in, but I knew a little of the outlandish lingo of the place and I managed to get along and see what there was to see.

" 'Along toward dark one night, on a lonely road, I heard what I thought was a woman's scream. I put on all sail and made for the spot and found an old man, a merchant I judged, set upon by robbers.

" 'I was glad of any excuse for excitement, and I lit into 'em. Little brown men they was, skinny and nothin' but cowards. I knocked over a couple of 'em and the rest skedaddled. Nothin' to it. But the old man thought it was wonderful. He blubbered and said I'd saved his life.

" 'Before I got away from him he made me take this trinket. Told me a long tale I I didn't half understand about how it had belonged to a prince or raja or something and how some day I would find that it was worth a king's ransom.

" 'Well, I stuck it in my chest with my other knicknacks and forgot all about it till just lately.' One of the passengers on a ship I was on, some sort of scholar chap, had a small boy what took a great shine to me.

" 'I was showin' my keepsakes to the kid one day when his dad come along and spotted this thing. He seemed quite excited about it. Said it was old and worth a lot of money, but he didn't know how much. He'd heard about you and advised me to show it to you. Thought p'raps you'd buy it.

" 'I didn't think much about it at the time, but now I'm thinkin' of gettin' married and comin' ashore for a time—leastways, as long as I can stand it—and I'd like to raise some money on this. You can make a good profit out of it, mister. Better take it.'

"He told his improbable story so glibly that my suspicions were more than ever confirmed. Furthermore, I happen to know enough about the antiquities of India and Ceylon to feel certain that this jewel never came from there. Just where it did come from I haven't yet determined, but it was not Ceylon.

" 'Of course,' I said, 'I can't make you an offer for this offhand. As I told you, it's a very unusual thing, and I shall have to study it and look through my books of reference before I can arrive at anything like its proper value. It might be worth ten dollars; it might be worth one thousand dollars. (I saw his eyes narrow avariciously at the mention of this latter sum.) If you can leave it with me for a day or two I may be able to give you an idea of its value, even if I can't buy it myself.'

"He was obviously reluctant to part with the jewel, even for a short time.

" 'I hate to let it out of my sight, mister,' he said. 'I know it's val'able and I've got

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sort of attached to it. Couldn't you look up them books now while I wait?'

" 'That wouldn't be possible,' I said, and held out the box.

"He stood for a minute undecided.

" 'All right, mister,' he said at length. 'I reckon I can trust ye. I'll be back tomorrow.'

"He left the shop, and that's the last I've seen of him."

"Well, I'll be switched," said Jake. "This is sure a queer go. He come from nobody knows where, and now—well, I reckon you don't need to look for him to come back for his trinket today or any other day. He's finished his tradin' for good."

"I judge not," said Adaskin. "And meanwhile I am in possession of an ancient and precious jewel of whose origin and proper ownership I know absolutely nothing."

WHILE Adaskin had been telling the story of the unknown sailor the two men and the dog had been walking along a country road between the outlying farms of Moreham and now approached a lonely stretch with woods and the foothills of the mountains along the eastern side. Ahead of them they could see a little knot of men and boys at the roadside.

"That's the place," said Waters, who was beginning to appear agitated again. "I take it Blanchard ain't removed the body yet."

They had dragged the dead sailor out of the roadway, and the corpse now lay face upward in the grass. Adaskin cast a single glance at it.

"The same one, Jake," said he. "See, Ginger recognizes him, too."

"He ought to," said Jake. "He was here this morning when I got here."

"He was?" said Adaskin. "Now, that's odd."

"What do you make of it, Adaskin?" asked the coroner.

"It seems to be a mystery so far, doctor," replied Adaskin, and he repeated in abbreviated form the story he had told the sheriff.

"What sort of wound did you find, doctor?"

The coroner turned the body over and parted the clothing, which he had slit for the purpose. There was blood on the shirt, but the flesh showed only a small incision, half an inch long at the most.

"It must have been an extraordinarily slender knife, Doctor Blanchard," observed Adaskin.

"And an extraordinarily long one," said the coroner. "It pierced the heart."

Adaskin sighed. The sight of the murdered man oppressed him. He turned and walked toward Ginger, who was sniffing eagerly at a damp spot by the roadside. Adaskin bent to look and then beckoned to Waters.

"Look here," said he. And Jake beheld in the soft earth the clearly defined print of a bare human foot pointing toward the woods.

IV

THE OWNER OF THE *MELVILLE*

TWO days later Adaskin sat at his desk, with Ginger curled up beside him, pondering the mystery of the antique topaz and the murder on the Letchworth Road. The coroner had closed his case and his jury had rendered the unsatisfactory but inevitable verdict of "murder by some person or persons unknown."

The body of the unidentified sailor had been buried at public expense, and Sheriff Waters had been unable to gather a shred of useful evidence bearing on the case, its motive or the identity of the principals.

A dozen times during this interval Adaskin had taken the jewel from his safe and had studied it with the utmost care and concentration, but had been unable to make anything of it. Nothing in his wide knowledge of ancient gems helped him toward any conclusion regarding its age or origin. Its cryptic inscription remained utterly unintelligible to him. And yet he felt that here must lie the key to the mystery of the murder.

Already the mystic topaz, with its uncanny glow and tint of blood, had begun to cast a sort of spell over him. A sense of unreality came upon him as he gazed at the gem in its golden setting, a sense of vague, far-off terrors, of heathenish enchantments, as if its touch had the power to transport him to the scene of some ancient and supernatural tragedy.

Of course this was nonsense, he told himself, begotten of weariness and the shock of the crime; but it persisted. And now, as he sat in his chair amid his familiar surroundings, it seemed to him as if something momentous were about to take place. Ginger

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awoke, stretched himself, and lifted inquiring eyes to his master's face.

It was with a sensation of relief that Adaskin, the sanest and least superstitious of men, saw his shop-door open and two men enter who were quite obviously living mortals of the present day. Both were well dressed, with the confident, urbane bearing of the modern business man. Probably they had just arrived on the morning train, for they were strangers to Moreham.

The one who advanced first was slightly the taller of the two. He had an athletic build and the free gait of the out-of-doors man, and his face was lean and tanned. It was a pleasant face, with bright, dark eyes, a direct glance and a mouth and chin that bespoke character.

The other was several shades less florid of complexion, with nervous eyes that wandered here and there and a brow that suggested the intellect of a rapid if not a profound thinker. Adaskin rose to meet them and Ginger took stock of them in his own peculiar way.

"This is Mr. Adaskin, I suppose," said the first, presenting two cards. "I feel honored to make your acquaintance, sir, for I have often heard of you through friends of mine who are collectors of one sort or another. My name is Trumbull."

Adaskin glanced at the bits of pasteboard in his hand. One was engraved with the name "Charles Horace Trumbull. Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts." The other was a business card and read "Frank Bycroft, Howell Detective Agency," and gave a Boston address. Adaskin extended his hand.

"I am much pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr. Trumbull. And yours, Mr. Bycroft. Perhaps you know my friend Mr. Logan of Pride's Crossing."

"Very well indeed," said Mr. Trumbull.

During these preliminaries Adaskin had been drawing up chairs and the three men seated themselves. Ginger, apparently satisfied as to their status, curled up again.

"MR. ADASKIN," began Trumbull, "I know enough about you to have the utmost confidence in you. I only regret that I lacked time to secure equally satisfactory credentials for myself, for I am very anxious that there should be entire candor between us.

"We have come to inquire about a gold and topaz jewel, a rare antique of unusual design, which has been lost by me and which Mr. Bycroft has traced in this direction. It seems most probable that it was brought to you for appraisal. I dislike to seem inquisitive, but I dislike beating about the bush even more, and I am going to ask you if you would be willing to tell us whether or not you have seen the jewel and what you know about it.

"I will only add that the information is of the greatest importance to myself and others, and I shall be only too glad to explain at length if you wish. But first I desire to know whether you have seen the jewel, for, if not, of course I do not wish to waste your time."

Adaskin scrutinized his features intently, noting the direct glance of his steady blue eyes.

"Will you kindly describe the jewel?" Adaskin requested.

Mr. Trumbull did so.

"It is locked in my safe," said Adaskin without further hesitation.

"Thank you," said Trumbull. "I may say that I expected you to treat the matter thus frankly. The jewel belongs to me. I do not ask you to take my word for it without adequate proof, but I do ask you to retain it in your possession, securely guarded, until ownership can be fully established."

"That is a reasonable request," said Adaskin. "I shall be only too glad to have such ownership proved, for I have been in a quandary about that jewel. I did not purchase it. It was brought to me for examination and possible purchase by a stranger unknown in Moreham—a sailor, we believe—who will never reappear to claim it. He was murdered on the Letchworth Road."

Trumbull nodded.

"Mr. Bycroft found the account of that murder in a Bangor newspaper, and I must tell you that we are as much mystified by that turn of events as any of you. However, we may together be able to work out the solution. Shall I tell you briefly the circumstances attending the theft of the jewel?"

"Pray do," said Adaskin.

"A little later, if you have the time and patience, I will tell you something about the jewel itself and the strange manner in which it came into my possession. For the present purpose it will suffice to say that it was

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given to me and that I valued it highly, though I had but the vaguest idea of its value as a rare antique or art object.

"As our friend Mr. Logan would probably tell you, I am somewhat of a rolling stone. Being possessed of independent means, I engage in business in Boston in only the most desultory fashion. I enjoy outdoor sports of all sorts, and being of a restless, roving disposition, I spend much time aboard my yacht, the *Melville*, seeking new fishing-waters and doing a little amateur exploring when the mood strikes me.

"We were on our way up from southern waters, intending to put in at Boston for a week or ten days and then proceed up the coast to Labrador, to take on a friend of mine, a member of the Harvard faculty, who, with a small party, has been doing scientific work there this Summer. On the way up the jewel was given to me by a dying man under circumstances which, as I say, caused me to value it most highly as a memento.

"At Boston I received word which induced me to hasten my cruise to Labrador, and we remained in port only long enough to stock up with supplies. I did not even run up to my home in Pride's Crossing, and the jewel remained in my cabin locker.

"My steward is a particularly reliable man, and I have always felt that valuables left in my locker are entirely safe. All of my officers, in fact, are trustworthy men who have been with me for some years; but occasionally, of course, it becomes necessary to make changes in the personnel of the crew.

"At Havana we found ourselves short-handed, and my sailing-master took on a seaman named Jones whose papers and references seemed to be all right. Though he didn't seem to mix very well with the rest of the men, his work was satisfactory, and at Boston we reshipped him for the Labrador cruise. I may as well state right here that Jones answered precisely the printed description of the man who visited you here and who was subsequently murdered.

"Not to string out this narrative, I will simply say that Jones and the jewel disappeared together one dark night off the coast of Maine. I am inclined to think that it was a simple theft, for he took also a sum of money.

"I had gone forward for some purpose, and when I returned I found my steward, Mr. Ball, lying at the head of the companion-way, stunned by a blow. We spent enough time over him to give the thief a good start.

"I piped all hands to quarters and discovered that Jones was missing. The ensuing investigation disclosed the fact that the yacht's dingey was also missing and my locker had been jimmied and rifled. The jewel was gone.

"We immediately put into Portland and notified the police. I wired my agent in Boston to engage the best detective he could find, and he sent Mr. Bycroft to me by the first train.

"Bycroft knows his business, and within twenty-four hours he had got on the track of Jones, who, as was most natural, had also made for Portland. I suppose he landed on the nearest point on the coast and then headed for the city overland. Bycroft found where he had bought landsman's clothes and where he had tried to dispose of the jewel.

"Apparently nobody in Portland would make him an offer for it, perhaps because they suspected him, but chiefly because they had no notion of its value. We learned that he had been referred to you as an expert, and Bycroft was about to run up to Moreham when he ran across the story of the murder in the Bangor paper.

"We could form no satisfactory theory as to the murder except that perhaps Jones had displayed the jewel indiscreetly and had been followed and robbed by some Portland thug. As the newspaper account made no mention of the jewel among the things found on his person we concluded that either he had left it with you or else his assailant had secured it. At any rate, we decided to call on you first, in the hope of getting on the track of it, and I am, I need hardly add, tremendously relieved to find that you have it.

"The jewel is the object of our quest, and if you will guard it I am confident that we shall have no difficulty in concluding matters in a manner satisfactory to all concerned."

"I shall be very glad to cooperate with you to that end," said Adaskin, "and I shall be delighted to have the troublesome jewel returned to its rightful owner. But I still feel concerned about the murder."

"So do I," said Trumbull, "and I have retained Mr. Bycroft to continue his investigations until that also is cleared up, if it is a possible thing."

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V

THE SHADOW IN THE DARK

IT IS our privilege to know somewhat more than Mr. Trumbull knew of the occurrences of a moonless night off the coast of Maine.

The sun had set behind a thick bank of cloud which slowly rolled up over the heavens, and the men aboard the trim yacht *Melville* watched the stars blotted out as if by some gigantic sponge.

"I don't like the look of this weather, Mr. Trumbull," said Captain Maude, the sailing-master.

"No more do I, captain," returned Trumbull, "and this isn't a pleasant coast to get into trouble on. We've got a good start. Better play safe and slow her down."

Presently the engine-room bell tinkled and the throb of the engines sank to a softened purring as the yacht lost headway.

"I reckon," said Seaman Jones to himself as he stood peering into the blackness over the starboard rail, "this is as good a night as any, and this watch are all dead ones."

He walked to where the yacht's dingey hung and began fussing about the boat's lashings.

"I wonder how much there is in that locker. Anyhow that jewelry thing is there, and I'll take a chance on that. The old professor and the boss both set great store by it; anybody could see that. Trumbull's had it out a dozen times, studyin' it. Them things is worth thousands o' dollars sometimes. I ain't knocked about for nothin', and I know."

Half an hour later Trumbull left his cabin and walked forward, with a word to the steward in passing.

"Now's my time," thought Jones, slipping out from the shadows in the waist of the yacht. The steward's form was clearly silhouetted in the light from the companion-way. Jones glanced furtively about him, and, apparently satisfied by the quiet that reigned on deck, made his way stealthily toward the owner's cabin.

Suddenly he paused. Some rustle not of the wind made him turn his head. A black shadow sank silently into the blacker shadows behind a bulkhead. Jones turned and investigated, but found nothing.

"It's that —— Indian," he muttered. "He's got on my nerves. But he'd better not get in my way tonight."

"That —— Indian," was a lithe, swarthy individual that had been serving as assistant cook ever since the death of the "professor." Strangely curious but apparently dumb, he was given to prowling about by himself; but the crew, finding him a poor subject for joking, had lost interest in him. He was evidently harmless as well as ignorant. The trouble was with Jones' nerves.

"I must hurry," thought Jones, "or the boss'll be back."

There followed the dull thud of a muffled blow, and the silhouette in the companion-way crumpled to nothingness. Jones hastened into the cabin.

Fifteen minutes later there was a rattle of blocks, drowned by the cry of the rising gale, as the yacht's dingey dropped into the water. Jones glanced up at the *Melville's* deck as he bent his back to the muffled oars. He could just make out a silent, mysterious shadow bending over the rail.

In another five minutes the shadow had disappeared from the rail and there was a soft splash in the water below.

VI

THE ARCHEOLOGIST

"MOREOVER," continued Adaskin, "I have an intense desire—professional, no doubt—to identify the jewel itself. It's a most extraordinary piece of work. Thus far I have been unable to make much of it, beyond the fact that the stone is a very unusual topaz. Where did it come from?"

"I'll tell you all I know about it, which is none too much," replied Trumbull, "and if it will help you to get on the track of its more ancient history, no one will be better pleased than I.

"At Panama during this last cruise I learned through roundabout channels, which it is unnecessary now to explain, of an American in trouble in Yucatan. An eminent archeologist named Esty was alone there and seriously ill.

"The expedition of which he was the head had been obliged to return to the States; but Doctor Esty, who found himself on the brink of certain important discoveries, persuaded them to leave him behind after making arrangements for his return. A fruit steamer, I believe, was to pick him up and

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take him to Panama, whence he was to take passage home; but somehow the steamer missed him and only brought word of his plight.

"He had been taken seriously ill, and it was a grave question whether he would be alive when the next steamer touched at the small east-coast port where he lay, as he had no care save that of ignorant natives. At any rate it appeared unsafe to leave him to the ordinary course of transportation. I had a fast yacht and was northward bound, and it sounded to me like a clear call to rescue.

"We lost no time in laying our course for the Yucatan village that had been described to us, and we were fortunate in finding Doctor Esty still alive, though very weak and ill. We got him on board, making all haste not only because of his condition, but because the head men of the village hinted vaguely at dangers which I did not understand. Some of the natives, it appeared, had become unfriendly toward the scientist.

"They warned me especially against a peon attendant who had accompanied the professor from the interior; but this fellow, whose name was Tongh, as nearly as I could get it, seemed to be devoted to the sick man —his only close friend, in fact. At the professor's request we brought him along.

"Doctor Esty's gratitude toward me was touching, for he knew he was in a bad way and he had his heart set on seeing his wife and children again, and on delivering safely the results of his explorations. We couldn't make out what the trouble was. He had no fever, but rather a sort of progressive and almost painful weakness. He could talk for only a few minutes at a time, and though the sea air and nourishing soups seemed to revive him somewhat I resolved to lose no time in getting him to a hospital. He was very little trouble, for his wants were few, and Tongh waited on him constantly.

"We steamed first to Havana, where I had a bit of business to attend to and where we could obtain the quickest medical attention available. But the Havana physicians —I consulted four—were unable to diagnose the professor's case without lengthy observation, and I resolved to hurry him back to the States, particularly as he entreated me to do so.

"During the run to Havana and afterward Doctor Esty told me his story in brief instalments. It seems that his expedition, which was made up chiefly of botanists and zoologists, stumbled on the relics of an ancient civilization in the interior of Yucatan which interested Doctor Esty, as an archeologist, to the point of excitement.

"He was not strong enough to tell me very much about it, but I judge that the ruins of buildings hundreds of years old, perhaps thousands, had been found and excavated in that country by previous expeditions, but that Doctor Esty believed he had discovered something of unusual importance—the seat of an ancient government, or something like that—with relics of royal dwellings and tombs and the central temples of an Aztec religion. His enthusiasm over this find would not permit him to return with the others.

"He conducted his excavations as well as he could alone, with such native help as he could get, writing a diary of his findings which he brought with him. He also brought a few fragments of stone and pottery bearing strange inscriptions, though he was obliged to leave most of the material to be secured by some future expedition.

"During these activities he was conscious of being hampered by a certain group of natives who seemed suspicious of his intentions, and there was an actual fight among his helpers one day when he unearthed a huge, altar-like stone and exhumed from beneath it the topaz jewel which you have in your safe. I regret to say that I know nothing more about it than that.

"Fearing that he might be attacked for the possession of an object of evident value, he hired a special guard and prepared to depart. From that time on he was ill, and by the time he reached the coast he was helpless.

"Only his grim determination to see his family again, I believe, and his desire to deliver the results of his work, kept him up. He was a lovable man, capable of great enthusiasms, and during that short time I became genuinely attached to him."

MR. TRUMBULL paused and drew his hand across his forehead, and then continued.

"Well, we didn't make it. Twelve hours out from Boston Harbor he died, and there was nothing left for me to do but to send the sad news to his family in Baltimore and arrange for the shipment of his body and effects.

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"He knew he was going, and toward the end he wanted me with him. He asked me to send his last affectionate message to his family and his diary and bits of inscription to a colleague at Johns Hopkins University. The diary should be interesting reading; I had time only to glance it over myself.

"I think, however, that it does not reveal very much about the topaz, which he insisted on my keeping as an expression of his gratitude. I promised to do so, and that is why I felt its loss so keenly."

"I quite understand," said Adaskin sympathetically. "And besides I feel sure that there is some mysterious significance attached to it."

"So do I," said Trumbull.

"What became of the servant, Tongh?" inquired Bycroft, speaking now for the first time.

"Ah," said Trumbull, "I fancy you've caught the same notion that I have. I wish I could tell you, for it may be that he holds the key to the mystery. I have no proof whatever, but the idea of slow poisoning at Tongh's hands has occurred to me, though I can not guess at a motive. I have suggested an autopsy to the authorities in Baltimore, but haven't heard from them yet.

"I don't recall when I first began to have dim suspicions. It may all be fancy anyway. No man could have appeared more devoted to a master than Tongh. When the professor, as we used to call him, died, Tongh gave no sign of grief, but I set that down to the stoicism of his race. I watched him closely, but his face was utterly stolid and expressionless.

"I had suggested shipping him back to Yucatan from Boston, but I decided to try to keep him with me for a time, at least until after the autopsy, and I offered him a place on the yacht as assistant cook for the Labrador cruise. I hardly thought he would try to poison us all. Somewhat to my surprize he readily consented.

"Now comes the strangest part of it all. The night Jones stole the topaz Tongh likewise disappeared. I can not believe that he went in the boat with Jones, for the sailor evidently disliked and distrusted the Indian, and they had nothing in common.

"My skipper thinks he must have dropped over the side and swum ashore. An Indian would have been capable of that. But for what purpose? To what end?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Trumbull," said Bycroft, "but you should have told me of this before."

"I know it," confessed Trumbull, "but the whole thing was so vague and confused in my own mind that I wanted to get it straightened out a bit first. It seemed to me desirable to stick for the present to the search for the topaz. Tongh seemed to have no connection with that. I have made inquiries everywhere we've been, but nobody has seen such an Indian, and he surely would have been noticed if he had accompanied Jones."

"I am inclined to think," said Adaskin quietly, "that we may be getting a little closer to the solution of this thing. May I ask you gentlemen to let me think it over a bit, and return here again tomorrow?"

After they had gone Adaskin turned to Ginger.

"There has been no Indian about here, Ginger," said he, "or you would surely have told me about it. But it may do no harm to take another sniff at the road near where the sailor was stabbed. Come along, boy."

VII

BENEATH THE CONSOLE

THAT night, in his little bedroom above the shop, Adaskin awoke with a start and with a confused sense that something had happened or was about to happen. He had been dreaming and the vapor of his dream still clung about him. He was more than ever oppressed by the feeling that past and present had somehow come very close together, that distances were all indefinite, that things were not what they seemed.

He gazed out through the moonlit window and shook himself together. A clock struck in the shop below, followed by the tinkle of the chimes.

"Two o'clock," said Adaskin aloud. "I wonder if anything's the matter."

In another moment he was acutely aware that something was the matter indeed. Below him he heard a sort of rush, mingled with Ginger's threatening snarl. Then a short, angry bark, the noise as of a brief struggle, the crash of something fallen upon or falling, a shrill scream, and then only Ginger's insistent growl.

Adaskin leaped from his bed, and without waiting to arm himself in any way hurried down-stairs and opened the door into his

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shop. The objects which crowded walls and floor, half-visible in the reflection of the moonlight outside, seemed to leap into life as Adaskin pressed the button in the wall beside him and turned on the lights.

The window which stood nearest the safe was open, and near it stood Ginger, the hair erect on his neck and back, growling and shifting on his feet menacingly, his nose pointed into the shadows. As the room was flooded with light the dog burst into a series of staccato barks of unmistakable meaning.

"What is it Ginger?" called Adaskin, hurrying forward.

Ginger paused only for a quick turn of the head and then resumed his threatening tactics.

Coming up behind the dog, Adaskin stooped down and beheld, beneath a marble-top console table of the period of Louis XV, which stood against the wall, the huddled form of a man, shrinking in abject terror before the dog and crowded into an unbelievably small sapce. A bare brown foot impressed itself on Adaskin's vision, dirty cotton trousers, a long, lean hand, and a dark face with open mouth and horrified eyes that seemed about to leap from their sockets.

Seeing Adaskin in the light, the man burst into a trembling torrent of unintelligible speech in a high-pitched voice—unintelligigible save that the man's whole being seemed to be pleading with Adaskin to take the dog away.

There was something startling, awful in an aspect of such unmitigated terror before which Adaskin instinctively drew back. It was less the fear of death that was depicted on that dark, distorted countenance than the horror of madness, the superstitious dread of the nameless. It was appalling. Then Adaskin collected himself.

"It appears," said he, "that you don't like dogs. I think you will do very well where you are for the present. Watch him, Ginger."

Then he went to the telephone and got the sleepy sheriff out of bed.

"This you, Jake? Adaskin talking. I want you to come over at once with handcuffs. No, no immediate danger. A man—an Indian—has broken into my shop. After that jewel the sailor brought me, I think. Ginger has him cornered, but you'd better hurry. Yes, an Indian. I'll explain later."

"Jake," said he, when Waters came in, "don't ask me too many questions now. I'm too much upset. But be sure to lock this fellow up tight. He can squeeze through a mouse-hole. You've got no ordinary thief here, Jake. You've got the murderer of that sailor!"

VIII

THE MADNESS OF TONGH

NEXT morning Main Street, Moreham, resumed its customary appearance of leisurely activity. The village was bathed in clear sunshine, and strangers coming in on the Bangor train would never have dreamed of the proximity of unexplained murder and far-fetched vengeance. Yet Adaskin could not rid himself of the sense of horror and evil enchantment.

Trumbull, Bycroft and Waters foregathered in Adaskin's shop, and the three men made their way quietly to the county jail.

"You can't make a thing out of that Indian," grumbled the sheriff. "He's dumb as a post."

"There's still a lot to be cleared up," said Bycroft. "We're all convinced, I take it, that he was after the topaz and for that reason murdered Jones, thinking the sailor still had it in his possession. But the motive is still obscure and the evidence entirely circumstantial."

"Thus far," said Adaskin, "it is. But we'll see."

They entered the jail and Waters led them to the cell in which the Indian peon had been placed. Through the bars they could see him squatting in a corner, impassive, impenetrable.

He scarcely glanced up when Waters unlocked and opened the door. For all that his face disclosed he might as well have been some heathen idol of forgotten significance, brought by the archeologist from Yucatan.

"It's Tongh, sure enough," whispered Trumbull.

"Suppose you speak to him," suggested Bycroft.

"Tongh!" cried Trumbull suddenly. "Look at me. You know me, your master's friend."

Tongh remained silent and motionless.

"I never did know how much English he understood," said Trumbull. "He can be both deaf and dumb when he likes."

Bycroft also made an effort to arouse him,

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but to no purpose. Then Ginger, his curiosity getting the better of him, crowded in between Adaskin's legs. He took a step or two forward, sniffing. Adaskin laid hold of his collar. A growl rattled in his throat and the hair rose on his neck.

The Indian's aspect changed instantly, violently. His apparently immobile features became suddenly distorted. His lips parted and his teeth gleamed in the twilight of the cell. His eyes blazed with combined terror and hatred and his whole face expressed the utmost malevolence.

His eyes shifted rapidly from side to side, as if seeking some avenue of possible escape. Then, finding himself cornered like a rat, he crouched, uttered a cat-like snarl and leaped toward his captors.

But Ginger was as quick as he. Wrenching himself from Adaskin's hand, he sprang, meeting Tongh in the middle of the cell. With his full weight he landed on the Indian's chest. The force of the impact threw both man and dog to the floor, and a long, narrow, gleaming knife of strange design went clattering into a corner.

Ginger, quickly recovering, would have sprung at his enemy's throat had not Adaskin, hurling himself forward like a football player, fallen upon the dog and seized his collar in both hands.

But the fight had gone out of Tongh. With a scream like that which Adaskin had heard in the night, he sank back cowering, his hands held before him imploringly, his terrified eyes staring at Ginger as if the dog were a very demon.

Adaskin dragged the growling and protesting Ginger from the cell.

"Come," said he, "we can do nothing more at present. The Indian evidently has an inordinate fear of dogs, or of this dog at any rate, and we must wait for him to quiet down. I shouldn't have allowed Ginger to come."

"It strikes me that it's a lucky thing you did," said Trumbull, glancing at the long, stiletto-like knife which Waters had picked up from the floor. "That Indian's a madman."

"From our point of view," replied Adaskin, "I think he is."

The sheriff locked the barred door on his trembling prisoner and then stood studying the exotic-looking weapon in his hand.

"I can't understand where he hid this," said he. "I had him thoroughly searched."

Adaskin smiled.

"He's not a white man, you know, Jake," said he.

"May I look at that?" asked Bycroft.

He took the knife and turned it over in his hands. It had a point like a needle.

"It must have been this knife, or one much like it," said he, "that caused the death of the sailor Jones, judging by the coroner's description of the wound. It's a strange weapon. Can you make anything out of this inscription, Mr. Adaskin?"

Adaskin took the knife, studied it intently, and shook his head.

"No," said he; "it's beyond me. It looks like the same sort of writing as that on the gold of the jewel. May I take it for a little time, Jake? It may help us yet to throw some light on the rest of this mystery."

That afternoon the sheriff looked in on his prisoner again. The Indian lay in a crumpled heap on the floor of the cell, stone dead. Beside him lay a small box fashioned of stained grasses, with the cover off and a bit of greenish powder in the bottom.

"Well," said Bycroft when they told him, "the Indian has saved us a heap of trouble. The jewel has been recovered and apparently there's no one left to hang. We may as well go home, Mr. Trumbull."

"After I've had another short talk with Adaskin," said Trumbull.

IX

THE AZTEC INSCRIPTIONS

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY,
Baltimore, Md.
September 5, 19—.

DEAR MR. ADASKIN:

I have already written Mr. Trumbull regarding the autopsy on the body of my beloved colleague, Doctor Esty. The surgeons are inclined to the belief that death was caused by some form of gradual hardening of the arteries and heart, and that this may have been induced by some sort of vegetable poison administered in such small doses that practically no traces of it remained in the digestive tract. Professionally they can be no more definite than that, but we are at liberty to draw our own conclusions.

As an archeologist and anthropologist your letter interested me tremendously, and I believe that your surmises are in the main correct. I have spent several days in an effort to decipher the tracings of the two inscriptions which you sent me.

I have seen and been able to translate a number of Aztec inscriptions of various sorts, from epitaphs to recipes for bread; but these are not quite like anything I have seen before.

I believe them to be of great antiquity and written

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in some learned or priestly dialect of the Aztec tongue. The characters are ideographs or hieroglyphs, each one equivalent to an English sentence, and as they are rather minute they doubtless comprise a complete little chapter of Aztec history and religion, even though confined to so small a space. I regret that I can not give you satisfactory translations, but I will give you as much as I feel fairly certain to be correct. I leave the doubtful passages in blank. First, the flat gold frame of the charm or jewel:

"Peace and eternal life—Chal—dog endowed with the soul of a god—savior of the maiden Makra, daughter of Taxon—I, Tapultepec, King, decree—a curse—who do him harm—madness, blindness, dumbness, sudden death—spoken—bear witness——"

It is rather fragmentary, you see. The inscription on the knife is even more puzzling.

"Order of the Picho, guardians of the Charm of Chal—oath by blood and fire—father to son and son—demon—death—stranger—death—dog—oath——"

There is a lot of patching together to be done before any sense can be made out of this, but possibly you, with your recognized ingenuity in such matters, can solve the riddle. I have given a good many years to the study of the Aztec civilization and religion, and for your assistance I am sending you a copy of my book on that subject, with certain pages marked. Also copies of some of Doctor Esty's notes.

It is natural that the sheriff and others should be puzzled to find a motive for murder when the topaz might have been recovered by a simple theft, but I think you will understand. One must take into account the ancient traditions of the Aztec race, in which the vendetta played a leading part.

Tongh was a fanatic with strange notions of his destiny inculcated in him from birth. He doubtless believed he was gaining Paradise by poisoning innocent Doctor Esty, who was responsible for the rape of the sacred gem. I think that was his idea rather than any theory of punishment.

And now, Mr. Adaskin, may I venture to enter a plea for the possession of these two priceless relics? If you and your friends could bring yourselves to loan the topaz charm and the dagger to our museum, I should consider it a mighty privilege. In this way a more complete and satisfactory translation might some day be accomplished.

I fancy the spell has about worked itself out. (In spite of my scientific training I can not rid myself of a sort of awe of these ancient superstitions.) In the seclusion of our quiet museum I think the malign influences that have been evoked might well be laid to rest. At least I should be willing to take a chance on that.

Mr. Trumbull writes me that he has seen all he wants to of the Aztec topaz.

Cordially yours,
EMERSON T. BRINCKLEY.

ADASKIN studied this letter and the writings of the two archeologists with painstaking care and eventually evolved the legend with which this narrative opens. Then he took out once more the Aztec topaz and sat for a long time with it in his hand. The bloody hue was distinct and impressive, and Adaskin knew that he held something very old and very strange. But already the baleful glow seemed to be dying in the depths of the gem, and the fog of mysterious unreality had begun to lift from Adaskin's brain.

"You have done your work for good and evil," said he, addressing the jewel in his hand. "The sailor and the Indian and Doctor Esty all are dead.

"You do not belong to me, and Mr. Trumbull seems afraid to take you back. I don't know that I altogether blame him. But you are most beautiful and most rare, if evil. I think the glass case of a museum is the best place for you.

"How that Indian feared you, Ginger," he continued, turning to the dog. "I wonder what he saw in you. I wonder if you can be the reincarnation of the Aztec Chal. He was a brave dog, too. Who knows?"

But Ginger, sitting on his haunches in the middle of an old Afghan rug, looked like nothing more mysterious and supernatural than a healthy Airedale terrier of lively spirit, obsessed with the idea that dinnertime was rapidly approaching.

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LOCAL COLOR IN LOCO-LAND

Author of "No Wonder," "Sparing the Family Tree," etc.

THEY got on the stage at Paradise. "Dirty Shirt" Jones looks at me with his one good eye, looking like he kinda blamed me, which he had no right to do. The Lord knows I wasn't responsible for them taking the stage.

One of 'em is kinda pink-faced and has got the weakest mustache I ever seen. Looked like somebody had hit him a glancing blow and knocked his eyebrow under his nose. Maybe I'd better say that he looked like some kinda delicate fruit which grew on the shady side of the tree and never got no chance to ripen.

The other one kinda bulges over the eyes, wears glasses and couldn't see Sentinel Butte at fifty feet with a ten-power field-glass. As far as their clothes are concerned—eleet. The pink one got hold of my hand and said—

"I am Orville Wellington Chatterton."

"I'm Ike Harper," says I. "Middle name failed me in infancy."

"This gentleman is William Burton Suggs," says he, pointing at his pardner.

"The pleasure is all mine," says Suggs, prospecting for my hand. "All mine, I assure you."

"I ain't trying to beat yuh out of anything," says I. "Both of yuh get used to Dirty Shirt Jones."

"What a peculiar middle name," says Orvie.

"Were you christened Dirty?" asks Suggs.

"Likely was," says I, and Dirty's one bum eye made three revolutions before it pointed back at the end of his nose.

"Gorgeous sunset," says Orvie. "Do you have them often?"

"Sunsets," says Dirty, "occur every day hereabouts."

"Wonderful country," applauds Suggs. "Makes one want to gambol like a sheep, doesn't it?"

"Sheep do not gamble," says Dirty.

"Cavort?" asks Orvie.

"Never heard of it, pardner."

"I have seen pictures——"

"I don't give a dang if you have," snorts Dirty. "Sheep do not gamble. Them artists don't *sabe* sheep."

"Are you fellers gamblers?" I asks.

"Oh, not at all," says Orvie. "Not in the least. Willie Suggs and I are of the literati."

"My ——!" gasps Dirty, pious-like. "Religious fanatics."

"We write books," says Suggs.

"Books? I had one once. It was called 'The Revelations of a Countess.' I loaned it to the Cross J bunch and they wore it out."

"We do not write trash," explains Orvie.

"Not at all," agrees Suggs. "Not at all, I assure you. We are planning to collaborate on an adventurous theme. Primitive men and women—red-blooded creatures, don't you know?"

"Sons of guns," nods Dirty. "Regular hellers, eh?"

"People who know not the veneer of civilization," says Orvie.

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"So," adds Suggs, "we have decided to penetrate the dim places and live amid our characters, gathering a wealth of local color before starting our story."

"They came here to penetrate," explains Dirty to me. "Huntin' for a dim place what ain't been veneered. My ——!"

"Yes," says Orvie, delighted-like; "to live amid the primeval hills. I have a pistol which will shoot five times."

He produces a .32 bulldog and gives us a peek at it.

"Wait a moment until I take the cartridges out and then you may handle it."

He broke it open, and Dirty let out a squeak—

"Aw, yuh broke its back!"

"Not at all. Merely the mechanics, I assure you. Would you like to see it?"

"Not me," says I. "I'm afraid I might get pinched in the hinges."

"I could have purchased one that would shoot six times."

"No use addin' insult to injury," says Dirty.

Suggs motioned Orvie to put the pistol back in his pocket and adjusts his specs.

"Ah—er—perhaps you gentlemen could be of material assistance to us. It is our desire to become acquainted with a—er — outlaw."

"With a price on his head," explains Orvie. "We wish to study him, don't you see? We would get his viewpoint and an insight of his feelings—know how it feels to have a price on one's head. Do I make my meaning clear?"

"Uh-huh," says Dirty. "Did you ever wear a derby hat?"

"I have indeed."

"There yuh are. More uncomfortable than a price."

"But not at all descriptive," objects Suggs. "Does not the banishment from society prey on his mind?"

"He won't mind if they don't."

"I see. Perhaps not; but I would love to experience the mental emotions of one who has committed a crime against society. I want to feel the exhilaration of the chase across the hills; eluding the posse, listening to their exclamations of baffled rage as they find I have escaped their net. Ah, that would be wonderful, would it not?"

"It would be," grins Dirty; "but I reckon you'd have to fix it up with the posse."

"If they used bloodhounds I could strew pepper in my tracks."

"And if there was snow on the ground one could walk backward, don't you know?" adds Orvie. "You see, we are familiar with a number of subterfuges; but we desire to get into the spirit of the thing, don't you know?"

"Ike," says Dirty, "these fellers don't want to just peek at—; they want to help stir the pitch. What had they better do?"

"Talk to 'Magpie' Simpkins."

"Has he a price on his head?" asks Suggs.

"If he has, nobody'd pay it; that's a cinch," replied Dirty.

"Has he ever killed any one?"

"He's the sheriff," says I. "He has to kill a lot of folks now and then."

"Very interesting," admits Orvie. "Rather a quaint character, I would say. I wonder if he could introduce us to some outlaws."

"Sure he could," says Dirty. "They're all friends of Magpie's."

If you don't mind I'll let Orvie and Suggs tell the rest of this tale. I reckon Orvie will do most of the telling, 'cause Suggs, being short of sight, might 'a' missed some details. Mr. Orville Wellington Chatterton talking:—

THERE is no doubt in my mind that Willie Suggs and I were right in seeking local color for our stories of the Old West. College professors, both in this country and abroad, have commented on my ability to describe locale, characters, etc., but I felt at a loss when I decided to write of the Old West.

Willie Suggs, a writer of witty dialogue—refined humor, I might say—agreed to collaborate with me in this effort. Reference books did not give us just the touch needed, so we decided to go to the source of information.

I do not know why we chose Montana. Paradise seemed a pleasant name, so we purchased our transportation to this point, where we boarded a stage, which would take us still farther into the primeval hills.

On this stage we made the acquaintance of two quaint, harmless characters, Mr. Jones and Mr. Harper. Mr. Jones has one eye, which is not all reliable, very large wrist-joints and toes inward as he walks.

Mr. Harper's eyebrows appear to have been set in a quizzical angle, and his pedal

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extremities are far from being perpendicular to his torso. I find that neither of them has the slightest conception of true humor, caused no doubt from living-conditions, as these people have no means of relaxation from their humdrum existence.

I asked Mr. Jones where we might find a dashing cowboy, of whom we might write, using him as a model for our hero. Mr. Jones took up the matter with Mr. Harper, who told me that very few of the cowboys were doing any dashing this year.

He also said that it was dangerous to do much dashing. He did not say why, but I conclude that, from the way he spoke, it is illegal.

They took us down to the sheriff's office and introduced us to Magpie Simpkins, who is a very tall person, with long, stringy mustaches. He tugged at one of these mustaches several times before shaking hands with us. I noted that his boots were badly run over at the heel, and the wrinkles of his rough shirt seemed a depositary for loose crums of tobacco. I said to him—

"It is indeed a pleasure."

He rolled and lighted a cigaret before he said—

"Feller is entitled to all the fun he can get out of life."

I am going to endeavor to reproduce their language as near as possible. Mr. Suggs said to him—

"You have a wonderful country, Mr. Simpkins."

It appears that none of the trio seemed pleased over this statement. Mr. Simpkins said—

"What for?"

I confess that I did not know, and I'm sure Willie did not, but Mr. Harper came to our assistance by saying—

"They write books."

Mr. Simpkins' face seemed to lengthen, and his lips formed the letter "O," but no sound came forth. Then his face gradually became normal again. Mr. Jones volunteered this ungrammatical information—

"It has a gun."

I took it from my pocket, intending to let Mr. Simpkins examine it, but he stopped me.

"Sh-h-h-h!" he said. "Don't let any one know you've got it."

"Will I have to use it?" I asked.

"If you get a chance."

"I should hate to kill a man with it," said I.

"I'd hate to try and kill one with it."

"What is the difference?" I asked.

He shook his head and said slowly—

"I don't know; I have never been killed yet."

"How many men have you killed?" asked Willie abruptly.

Mr. Simpkins' face seemed to lengthen again and he shut his eyes as though in deep thought. Then he opened his eyes and looked at Mr. Harper.

"Ike, did you check up last week?"

Mr. Harper shook his head and started to explain, but Mr. Simpkins fairly thundered:

"You're a fine deputy! Make up that count at once."

Mr. Harper asked if he should include Indians, but Mr. Simpkins said:

"Nothing less than half-breeds. Indians don't count."

I tried to explain that I only wanted an approximate number, but he said that accuracy was his motto, and that he would not lie to me over such a small matter.

I find that honesty is cultivated to an astonishing degree with these people. Perhaps it is on account of their childlike faith. Mr. Suggs asked them if they had ever heard of George Washington and the cherry-tree. He told them the tale, and they seemed interested. Mr. Jones said:

"Nothing to whoop about. You ought to know 'Chuck' Warner."

I WAS about to evince a desire to meet Mr. Warner, when a cowboy came in. This newcomer was of peculiar physique. His legs were altogether too short for the length of his body. His face reminded me of the aborigine—being rather long, with prominent cheek-bones.

His ears were very prominent. In fact, they stood out from his head as an animal's ears do when seeking sounds. He looked at Mr. Suggs and myself, and I will give you my word, those ears moved backward and forward.

"Chuck," said Mr. Harper, "this is Chatterton and Suggs. Gents, this here apparition is Chuck Warner."

"They write books," stated Mr. Jones.

Mr. Warner's ears waved a few times and then he said:

"Shucks. I hope they're writin' some more 'Countess' stuff."

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I repeated myself by saying that I did not write trash.

"She was a good book," said Mr. Warner, "but she had one bad fault."

I was glad to have a chance to test their ability to criticize literature; so I asked them what that fault was.

"It was too —— short," said Mr. Warner, and the rest nodded.

Which I think is an unfair criticism of any book, but I suspect they have little to read, and length is a consideration. I said to Mr. Warner:

"These gentlemen have recommended you very highly as a model of veracity. In fact they have compared you with the immortal Washington. Mr. Suggs and I would like to associate with you, with the idea in mind of incorporating your character in our great story of the West."

He stared at me for a long time, wiggling his ears all the while, and then he looked at Messrs. Jones, Simpkins and Harper. I am going to write this as near as possible to his actual words, although I can not depict the voice:

"My —— ! Here's the best chance I ever had, and I'm scared of myself."

Then he turned and walked out of the door. It was a psychological moment for him. He realized that this was his opportunity to be immortalized in prose, but he shrank from the ordeal. Human nature is like that, I think.

I told them my opinion, and I think Mr. Simpkins shed tears. It is distressing to see a man cry—a strong man, who kills men without a qualm. Mr. Jones did not cry, but his affected optic seemed to shuttle back and forth before becoming fixed at a certain point.

Mr. Harper turned away and appeared to be interested in a piece of printed matter, but just to illustrate his emotions—the printed matter was upside down. Mr. Suggs said it was one of the most touching things he had ever experienced.

I told Mr. Simpkins that I wanted to meet a noted outlaw—one with a large price on his head.

"You and me both," said Mr. Simpkins.

Mr. Jones had walked over by the door, and now he turned and said to me—

"There's the man you're looking for."

I walked to the door. Across the street a man was dismounting from a horse.

"Greatest sheep-thief in the world," said Mr. Jones. "I'll bet he can tell you things you won't find in books."

"Who is it, Dirty Shirt?" asked Mr. Simpkins.

" 'Jay-Bird,' " was Mr. Jones' reply.

Mr. Simpkins repeated the name chokingly.

"Will you introduce us?" I asked.

It seems that my question surprized Mr. Jones, for he said:

"I will not. He has sworn to shoot me on sight."

This information thrilled me. It was life in the rough. I asked him if it would be safe to approach this outlaw, and he said the safest way would be to carry my gun in my hand to show that I was prepared, as a sheep-thief never shoots any one except unarmed men, so he said.

Willie Suggs was eager to meet this Jay-Bird person, so we excused ourselves and hurried over across the street and went inside the place.

We found this Jay-Bird standing at a long counter, talking with a number of rough men. Mr. Warner was sitting on a table, smoking, and when he saw us he turned away. He seemed to be sitting on his right hand.

I carried my new gun in my right hand. This Jay-Bird person is really fierce of aspect. I touched him on the shoulder, and he turned just as he was about to imbibe some liquid from a small glass. He stared at us and then down at the gun in my hand. I said—

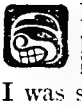
"I want you to understand that we are not policemen."

He looked at the glass of liquor and then at himself in the big mirror. Then he placed the glass on the counter and said—

"I think my sins have found me out."

I said—very kindly, I think—

"I want you to understand that personally we do not care how many sheep you have stolen."



I AM at a loss to describe what happened, for the reason that I do not know. When I awoke I found that I was sitting on the ground with my back against sort of a trough affair, and Mr. Warner was laving my face with water, which he was pouring from a boot. Mr. Suggs was sitting in the same position, with his hands folded on his lap. I said to Mr. Warner—

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"Was any one else saved?"

He said something about quite a lot of them getting away alive.

"It was a dreadful calamity," said Willie Suggs, and his voice sounded far away. "Some powerful explosive, I presume."

"I am thankful to have gotten away with my life," said I.

"I am not sure about mine," replied Willie. "At times I think I am not going to recover my equilibrium."

"I reckon you got Jay-Bird's goat," said Mr. Warner.

Willie said he was sorry that a dumb animal should suffer. I asked Mr. Warner what really happened, and he said it was beyond his descriptive powers. I think he has little imagination.

Mr. Jones and Mr. Harper came over to us, and Mr. Jones said that we had better quit and call it a day. It was getting dark.

Mr. Jones took us over and introduced us to a Mr. Samuel Holt, who owns the hotel. Mr. Jones told us that Mr. Holt was a good old Injun, but he did not resemble one in the least. We procured a room. I have read considerable about the American Indian, and I never look down upon any race, regardless of color. I wished to be friendly with Mr. Holt, so I asked—

"Have you any papooses?"

He did not seem to understand.

"Have you any papooses?" I cried very loudly. "Indian children?"

There were several cowboys coming out of the dining-room when I asked the question. I know that Mr. Holt understood, or at least I think he did.

He stooped down behind the counter and when he came up he had a two-barreled gun in his hands. Then he slowly laid the gun down. I noticed that Mr. Jones had a pistol in his hand and it was pointing at Mr. Holt. Mr. Jones said—

"Have a little sense, Sam."

We went up-stairs, and as we went I saw the cowboys come up to the counter. Mr. Holt was watching us go up. One of the cowboys began a peculiar dance around the room, and at each step he would grunt—

"Hy-yah, hy-yah, hy-yah!"

It seemed to amuse the others—except Mr. Holt.

Mr. Jones took us to a room. I asked him why Mr. Holt was angered at my question, and he said that Mr. Holt had so many papooses that it made him angry when anybody asked him how many he had. Mr. Jones went away after bidding us good-night.

Willie was very thoughtful for a while, and then he said that we really should go down and apologize to Mr. Holt. He said that it was the only decent thing to do. I agreed with him.

We went back down the stairs and found Mr. Holt and three other gentlemen playing cards in the hotel office. I started to speak to Mr. Holt, and just then several more men came in. I waited until they come up to us, and then I said:

"Mr. Holt, my friend Mr. William Burton Suggs and myself have decided to make a public apology to you. I asked you a very personal question a short time ago, and I wish to apologize for it.

"I did not know at the time that you were the father of so many papooses, or I would have never spoken as I did. Although you are a proud Indian I hope you will accept this apology from a white man."

Mr. Holt got to his feet very slowly and faced me. I put out my hand to shake hands with him when something seemed to hit me right between the eyes, and when I quit rolling I was almost to the door. Then I heard a voice cry, "Run, you —— fool!" and the form of William Burton Suggs hurdled over me, evidently intending to go out of the door; but poor Willie is a trifle nearsighted and mistook the window for the door. I heard the crash of glass, and then came two thunderous reports. Missiles seemed to rain all around me, and I tumbled outside.

I know I ran and ran until some one caught me. It was Mr. Warner.

"Where is Willie?" I asked. "William Burton Suggs?"

"I heard a splash," said Mr. Warner. "I think Willie fell into Pete Gonyer's horse-trough."

"He can not swim!" I panted.

Just then we heard Willie crying:

"Assistance! Assistance! Will no one assist me?"

"He is drowning!" I gasped.

"Well," said Mr. Warner, "if he is he has a different way of drowning than most folks."

We found Willie sitting in about three inches of water. He had lost his glasses and his hat, and his coat was split from the bottom to a point very near his collar.

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Mr. Warner asked me what had happened, and I told him of the apology. I told him what Mr. Jones had said. I do not know what Mr. Warner meant when he said—

"I reckon I better hump myself or Dirty Shirt will have me beat four ways from the jack."

"But I am still in ignorance!" wailed Willie.

"Cinch," replied Mr. Warner.

Just then Mr. Simpkins came alone. He asked Mr. Warner what the trouble was, and Mr. Warner told him of the apology to Mr. Holt. Mr. Simpkins did not say anything, so I said—

"I know I shall never apologize to an Indian again."

"I am all wet," declared Willie, "all except my head, and I fear that my head is fearfully injured."

"Lucky for you," said Mr. Warner. "You might have stubbed your toe and hurt yourself."

"I will not go back to that hotel," I declared. "I will sleep in a gutter before I will go back there."

"Let 'em sleep in the jail, Magpie," suggested Mr. Warner. "It will be an experience for them. Got anybody in there?"

" 'Scissorbill' Seeley and 'Cinch' Cooley."

"I thought you sent them to the pen."

"Tomorrow. Sure you fellers can sleep in the jail if yuh want to. I've got a couple in there now, but they're in a different room."

"Did they insult somebody?" asked Willie.

"Nope—just a pair of honest horse-thieves."

"Can a horse-thief be honest?" asked Willie.

"As long as he minds his own business," says Mr. Warner.

IT WAS surely a novel experience to sleep in a jail. There were two narrow cots, but no other furniture. After Mr. Simpkins and Mr. Warner were gone I aid to Willie—

"Now is our chance to visualize the feelings of men who are incarcerated for crime."

From the next room came a voice saying:

"My ——, Scissorbill, somebody opened the booktionary!"

We did not say anything for a while, and then I said—

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen; but are you the pair of honest horse-thieves Mr. Simpkins spoke about?"

"The only two in captivity," said a voice.

"Orville, here is our chance," whispered Willie. "These are *bona-fide* horse-thieves, and this is an opportunity we have wished for. Let us converse with them."

We went out into the main room and up to their door. The upper half of the door is a series of iron bars. The moment I saw them I was delighted. Types! I give you my word of honor, I have never seen such types.

They were delighted to see us. I told them what we were doing. Mr. Cooley spoke feelingly of literature. Asked him if he knew any of the great authors. He said he was very familiar with Sears and Roebuck. I have never heard of them. In fact, up to the present time, I have cared little for collaborators.

Mr. Seeley said it was a shame that we couldn't all sit down together, but the door was locked. I offered to find Mr. Simpkins and have him open the door, but Mr. Cooley said it was too much bother. Then he told me where he thought I could find the key, and sure enough it was there—in a drawer of the sheriff's desk.

We went in and sat down. Mr. Seeley asked us if we wouldn't like some refreshments, and I said that I surely would, as I had neglected to eat any dinner. They were very thoughtful. Mr. Cooley said that he and Mr. Seeley would go out and get us all something to eat and drink. I thanked them kindly.

They shut the door and went out. Willie was near the door, and after they went out the office door he said to me—

"Orville, this must be a very primitive place."

I asked him why, and he said:

"Well, they each took a gun from the cabinet behind the sheriff's desk. Queer, don't you think, that a man should arm himself when going after refreshments?"

I said, "They must know what they are doing, William."

We sat there waiting for at least an hour. There was only one lamp in the place. It was suspended from the center of the room. It began to get dim and finally flickered out, leaving us in darkness.

"I do not think we did quite right in letting those men out of here," observed Willie.

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"Somehow I seem to have an idea that Mr. Simpkins will be displeased."

I said: "Well, they will surely be back. Their honesty seems unquestioned."

But they did not return, so we decided to go back to our own room, but were unable to, as the door was locked from the outside. It must have been one of those spring locks which lock automatically. It was of no great concern, as the rooms seem to be very much alike; so we undressed and went to bed.

I do not know what time of night it was when I awoke. I know it was very, very dark, but I could sense the presence of human beings. I heard a voice say, very softly—

"If they make a yelp—bend a gun over their heads."

I mentally decided not to utter a sound. William Burton Suggs was snoring, unmindful of it all.

I was tempted to rouse him and convey a warning for silence, but decided to let him remain as he was. Oftentimes one will cry out on being aroused, and I knew that Willie would shrink from having a gun bent over his head.

I still had my gun; but I have no desire to shoot in the dark, so I did not take it from my pocket. It seemed that the room was full of men, although I could not see any of them. I heard one of them say:

"Rattle your hocks a little. Don't take all night to open one little door."

Just then came a splintering sound, and some one said—

"It's —— funny that they don't wake up."

And then another said—

"Betcha forty dollars they ain't here."

Then the room seemed to fill up with men. One of them grasped me by the throat. I am not used to such treatment, don't you know, so I struck him viciously. I know he swore.

Then I heard Willie Suggs scream, and my blood turned cold. The blood of my ancestors boiled in my veins, and I fought—a little. I dimly heard a voice saying—

"This is one pair of horse-thieves that won't cost the tax-payers anything."

IT SUDDENLY struck me that there had been a mistake made, but the rope around my neck prevented me from exposing their error. I had one free arm, and it suddenly struck me that I might attract their attention by using my gun.

Gasping for breath, I drew my gun and pressed the trigger. I heard a voice swear in my ear; some one crashed into me and then I fired once more. I heard some one yell—

"Where did that —— fool get a gun?"

I tried to tell him, but just then I appeared to be yanked upside down and felt myself being dragged across the floor and out into the night. Men were running around, and I may also add that I have never heard so much profanity before. Dimly I heard a man say:

"Put 'em both on that sorrel! Rattle your hocks! That —— gun has woke everybody up!"

I felt myself lifted on to a horse, which was surging and snorting, and then some ropes seemed to grasp my ankles.

The pressure on my throat was relieved. I reached out with my hands and grasped a man who seemed to be sitting in front of me. Just then I heard a yell:

"Hit the grit! Here they come!"

Some one struck the horse, a man yelled a curse, and a gun was fired. Several horses seemed to crash into us, and then began a strange voyage in the dark, accompanied by yells and the sound of pistol-shots.

At the first sudden movement of our horse my nose came in sharp contact with the back of my companion's head. I give you my word of honor that if I ever have occasion to strike a man it will not be on the nose.

For a few moments I did not take much heed. I know that I lost my customary poise. In fact, the erratic movements of that horse disconcerted me greatly. From where I sat it was impossible to judge which way we were going, because the horse did not seem to have any definite objective point.

I feel sure that if it were not for the confining ropes I would have escaped. As it was there was just enough slack to cause me discomfort.

I caught a glimpse of the lighted street as we passed through. Men were running and shouting, trying no doubt to attract my attention, but whether they did or not I really can't say, as the party in front of me seemed to delight in swaying back and bruising my sore nose.

I started to call his attention to this

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matter, but he hit me again and drove the words from my lips.

Then we left the city behind. I was holding both hands before my nose as a protection from the brute in front of me, when suddenly the horse gave an extra severe lunge, and I seemed to feel nothing under me except vacant atmosphere.

Then came a terrific crash, which completely squelched me, if I may use that word. I do not know how long I lay there, but it seemed years. A great weight seemed to press down upon my chest, which interfered with my respiration.

I tried to struggle to a sitting position, but was unable to move. Then I said aloud—

"Orville Wellington Chatterton, I greatly fear that your usefulness to mankind is over."

"Ditto for William Burton Suggs," said a voice weakly, and the weight seemed to slide from my chest.

"Willie!" I gasped. "Are you here?"

"Well," he replied, and his voice fairly croaked, "it is a debatable point, Orville. I am here in spirit, but there is a serious doubt in my mind as to the flesh. Are you hurt?"

"I am not," I replied with difficulty. "Either I am uninjured or I am completely paralyzed."

I moved my legs and immediately discovered that it was not paralysis. My nose was swollen to twice its natural size, and one of my eyes appeared quite useless. I asked Willie where our horse had gone, and he said that he did not know, but that it may have gone straight up. I told him that horses were not capable of going straight up, and he said, very vehemently, that this was an entirely capable horse.

"It did quite well in that respect with our weight on its back," said Willie, "so I can see no reason why it could not accomplish its purpose after we were no longer astride its back."

I said—

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"If you think it is funny, Orville, you have weird ideas of humor. I was merely disputing your ideas of natural history."

"But," said I, "it is an indisputable fact——"

I am not going to quote Willie's interruption, because it was very, very profane. I did not think it of him.

We struggled to our feet and examined our surroundings as well as we could in the dark, but could see no lights.

"I am sure I do not know where to go," said Willie.

"I have not asked you for a direction, have I?" said I. "I think I am entirely capable of finding a place."

"If I had a hat I'd take it off to you, Orville. Lead on."

Thus challenged, I started out, with Willie at my heels. In the daytime one may find a certain direction by consulting the sun. I have heard that woodmen can tell the compass points by the foliage of trees. We had no sun and no trees. We were fortunate, I think, to go in any direction.

WE WENT silently and slowly. In the dim light I could see darker mounds around us. It was very peculiar. I stopped and mentioned the fact to Willie, who said:

"The topography of the country has little appeal to me. I am going to cry for help."

William Burton Suggs had a very penetrating voice, and his cry for help was loud and earnest. We listened for a reply.

Suddenly Willie grasped me by the arm.

"Orville, the peculiar lumps are getting up!"

They were, sure enough! They not only got up, but seemed to draw closer to us. One of them made a low grumbling noise.

"I think," said Willie nervously, clutching my sleeve, "I think it is cows—I—er—I believe those are cows."

Another of the bulky figures emitted a sneezing noise, and then another said—

"Ba-a-a-a!"

Then they moved in closer.

"They have nothing against us," said I, trying to reassure Willie.

"I—I know that," said Willie, "but it is so dark that they do not know who we are."

I looked around, but found that we were hemmed in completely. In fact, it was a veritable cow *cul de sac*.

"Sh-should one pray?" asked Willie.

I believe in prayer, but I think there is a right and a wrong time for it. Anyway my nerves were too unstrung for cool and collected thought, and before I knew what I was doing I had rushed right at the barrier of cows, shouting:

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"Boo! Boo! Boo!"

I really did not know I was so close to them. Darkness is deceiving, I think, and I crashed into the front end of one of the animals as I uttered my final "Boo!"

I am not sure, but I think the animal was unable to escape my rush. At any rate my coat became entangled in it's horns, which prevented me from withdrawing. I heard William Burton Suggs cry for help, but I was in no position to give assistance to any one.

My cow—I will call it my cow to differentiate it from the other cows, although I had no legal title to ownership—my cow, instead of going away from me, came forward, with such force and abruptness that I sprawled across its neck and horns. The skin of its neck was sufficiently loose to enable me to grasp its folds firmly, and then I appeared to be moving, although I had no idea of whether the cow was going backward or forward.

I succeeded in lifting my head and I beheld a sea of dark forms moving with us. The earth seemed to tremble with their tread, and ever and anon one of them would moan loudly. Suddenly I heard a human voice crying—

"Yee-e-e-e-ow!"

And I glimpsed the flash of a pistol, but heard no report. Then I heard another voice crying—

"Let 'em go to——; we can't stop 'em!"

I am not sure but what the cows went to the designated place, for suddenly the ground gave way under us. I remember feeling my hands slip and hearing the tearing sound from my coat, and then there came a bright light. I really remember nothing more for some time.

When I awoke I appeared to be reclining in some very sticky substance, which emitted a sucking noise as I sat up. I believe it was mud. I did not have complete control of my limbs, and my nose and ears seemed to be entirely out of commission. Stumbling around in the ooze, I discovered what I took to be a stump; but when I sat down on it it collapsed with an audible grunt.

"Who and what are you?" I managed to ask.

"I am William Burton Suggs," says he dazedly. "I think I am a —— fool."

"Why are you?" I asked.

"Because I did not let loose of that cow's tail before the cow jumped off the earth."

"Well," said I, "I think we are in a depression in the earth, Willie. Let us get back to the town if possible, and procure dry clothing."

Willie grunted an assent and we made our first attempt. No less than seven times did I almost reach the top, only to slide down and half-bury myself in that sticky mud. The eighth time I was successful.

I think that Willie made it on his first attempt. At any rate he called across to me and asked what I was doing on that side. I said, "Nothing." Then he made this suggestion;

"If you will run down your side the momentum will carry you up this side."

The theory was very good, and it would have worked if I had not slipped on the downward run. My head and shoulders plowed into the mud, but I got to my feet and marched right up to him. I fear that I was exasperated, but I said nothing.

It was getting lighter now, but we had no idea of the right direction. Neither of us was in any condition to walk. I was barely able to see, and I ached in every muscle.

Willie was nearly as badly mutilated as I was, especially in the limbs. He said it was caused from keeping up with the cow. He also said there was another cow close behind him, which prodded him to swifter action. He said it was what he would call a "cowpuncher."

SUDDENLY we entered a clump of small trees, and right before us stood two horses, saddled and bridled. There was no one in sight.

"I think," said Willie, "I think this is a pair of abandoned horses, Orville. We will ride."

"Perhaps you are right," I replied. "But suppose they are not? We would be horse-thieves."

"Precisely. It is a chance to experience the mental emotions of a horse-thief. At any rate I can walk no further."

We untied the ropes. It was a difficult matter to get on the horses, as they were rather restive, but at last I succeeded in getting on behind the saddle. Just then we heard a voice exclaim——

"What in ——!"

And then another voice—

"Let 'em go, Cinch!"

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Our horses needed no urging. I clung to the rear of that saddle with both hands and onward we went. I could see Willie humped up on his horse, and then I passed him. Suddenly I seemed to hear a peculiar sound past my ear. It was sort of a *pwee-e-e-e*, and I seemed to hear the report of a gun.

I turned my head. Behind me thundered William Burton Suggs on his horse, while seemingly from all directions came riders. There were numerous puffs of smoke, and a number of bees seemed to pass my head.

It seemed as if one of the bees stung my horse, for it nearly unseated me for a moment. I clung tightly to the saddle and let the horse pick its own way. Once I looked back and the riders seemed to be gaining a little.

I do not know how far we rode before I lifted my head and saw the town of Piperock just ahead of me. Willie's horse had increased its speed until we were almost side by side. Behind us came the riders.

The town seemed aroused. Several men ran into the street, and one of them seemed to be waving something. This, later on, appeared to be a rope.

My horse swerved as if to pass them, but evidently thought better of it, and the next thing I knew my horse was dashing right for the open door of a business place. This appeared ridiculous, did it not? Perhaps the horse thought it was a stable. At any rate we went inside, and Willie's horse followed us in.

I do not know just what happened, but I seemed to get a momentary glimpse of the place, which showed it to have been the same place where I had questioned Jay-Bird, and then my horse struck the stove, I think, and I struck the top of the rear door as I fairly flew outside.

No, I was not injured—that is, I was not hurt. I felt no pain. I got to my feet, which did not feel at all like my feet, and started away on legs that I am sure did not belong to me, when something seemed to coil around my body and I was flung down. I dimly heard a voice say—

"This ain't neither of them, Magpie."

And then another voice said—

"If yuh wash the alkali mud off this one I think you'll find Orvie underneath."

Somebody swore very profanely, and then another voice said:

"The other —— fool went plumb through Buck's mirror. He's got seven years of bad luck comin' to him."

"If this hunk of mud ever gets its voice back I've got a few questions to ask it," stated a voice, which I think belonged to Mr. Simpkins.

"Do yuh reckon that bunch tried to lynch these two, thinkin' they was Cinch and Scissorbill?" asked a voice.

"If they did they ought to be sent up for not makin' a good job of it."

Then everything seemed to fade away. I do not know what happened in the interim. It was very much like the moving picture, where a lapse of time is shown. One never knows what the characters have been doing during this time. At any rate, I awoke and stared around.

I was sitting on a seat, and beside me was something which I knew must be William Burton Suggs, although he did not look so much like William. On the seat ahead of us sat the man who drove the stage when we came in. Standing on the sidewalk were a number of men; among them were Mr. Harper, Mr. Simpkins, Mr. Warner and Mr. Jones.

"He's awake now, so yuh can take the ropes off," said Mr. Simpkins.

I LOOKED down and beheld my hands and feet tied with rope, which extended behind me and was tied to the rear of the seat. Mr. Jones began unfastening the knots.

"Why was I tied?" I asked, and my voice did not sound at all familiar to me.

"You was loco," explained Mr. Jones. "You had a idea you wanted to rob a bank."

"You sure are a hog for action, feller," said Mr. Simpkins. "You turned two of the worst horse-thieves in the county loose, almost got lynched by mistake, took them same horse-thieves' horses away from right under their noses when we had 'em surrounded; ducked about fifty pounds of hot lead and wrecked a saloon."

"And then insisted on robbin' a bank," grinned Mr. Warner, wiggling his ears.

"Where are we going now?" I asked.

"Out!" said Mr. Simpkins, pointing down the road. "If yuh simply must write stories—stay at home, in the house."

"But," I objected, "one must have experience——"

"Don't come here," said Mr. Simpkins.

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"This ain't no place for to get experience."

"The feller what wrote 'The Revelations of a Countess' didn't have experience," said Mr. Warner. "He used his imagination."

"I—I think," said Willie, "I think that is sufficient."

"It sure as —— was for us," nodded Mr. Jones.

"Shake a hoof, broncs!" cried the driver, and we went out of the West—a very peculiar place, and utterly devoid, I think, of romance. I said to William Burton Suggs:

"Willie, could you describe any of the emotions, feelings, etc., that you experienced?"

"Yes," said he, very thoughtful. "Yes, I can, Orville."

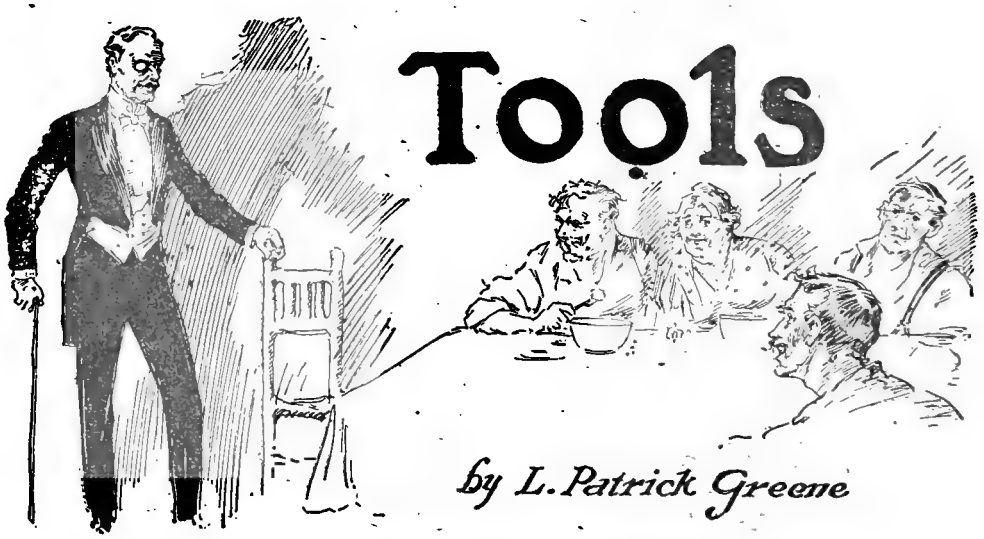
For a while he was silent as the stage rocked along over the dusty road. Then he grimaced with pain and said—

"Slow recovery from complete paralysis."

I said—

"Please do not explain it."

I wanted to find out the sensation for myself.



Tools

by L. Patrick Greene

Author of "The Little Thing," "Lines of Cleavage," etc.

GEORGETOWN boasted of one hotel, the Imperial, and it differed in no degree from the tin-roofed, mud-walled building which holds a prominent place in any typical South African mining settlement.

The Imperial did not cater to transients, and its guests were more or less permanent. For the most part they were miners, their wives and families.

The men can be described offhand as "diamonds in the rough," and if they owned clothing other than the khaki slacks, gray flannel shirts, and high boots of their calling, they never gave evidence of such possession. They worked hard under trying conditions, but the wages were high, and with the optimism of the Eternal Boy which is in every man they were able to look forward to the time when they could go home and live like "fighting cocks" on their savings.

As for the women, some few struggled to preserve their femininity in this little world of men, and eagerly purchased any new toilet preparation guaranteed to preserve the bloom of youth or to protect "the most delicate complexion from the fierce rays of the African sun." Most of them, however, had long since given up the apparently hopeless struggle and slumped physically and mentally.

The evening meal, "dinner," was the one event of the day at the Imperial. Indeed it was the social event of Georgetown.

All the hotel guests came together for that one meal; and the number was augmented by such tradesmen as the town supported, and occasionally officials from the Portuguese territory across the river.

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The meal was served in a large barn-like room, known as the Banqueting-Hall. Save for one long deal table, covered with oil-cloth of a once gorgeous pattern, some nondescript chairs, and a few small, round-topped tables, the room was devoid of furniture.

Evil-smelling oil lamps provided the illumination and added their iota to the oppressive heat. Flies buzzed lazily about the room, and above their low drone came the sharper, vicious "ping" of mosquitoes.

A dreary place was this banqueting-hall of the Imperial Hotel; and, it must be said, the diners made no effort to rise above their environment.

Tonight was no exception.

The men folk were weary; and the women, prostrated by the intense heat of the day, spoke rarely. It would have been better perhaps if they had kept altogether silent, for when they did speak there was a bitter rasp in their voices that set all nerves on edge and precipitated more than one domestic quarrel.

Native waiters in once white uniforms moved languidly about, serving the first course—hot, greasy soup in thick, chipped plates.

And then, conjuring up memories of another clime and different surroundings, a vision projected itself into the room.

At the sight of it what idle gossip was being indulged in stopped; domestic squalls were suddenly calmed. Women whose expression had hitherto been listless looked in admiration with perhaps a flicker of regret that they had not taken more pains with their toilet. With fluttering, patting hands, they furtively essayed to smooth into a semblance of order, hair which had been disarranged during the long afternoon siesta.

The first effect of the vision upon the men was one of silent amazement; but that was quickly followed by a contemptuous amusement. Some even gave vent to loud hoots of derision—quickly silenced, to be sure, by the indignant looks of the women.

As for the cause of all this, he hesitated a moment in the entrance. But his hesitation was not one of indecision, rather it was as if he waited for—well, a head waiter to lead him to the table.

Yes. Even so.

At the Ritz Carlton a man in evening dress is, to say the least, inconspicuous unless his attire be faulty. But at the Imperial Hotel in Georgetown, South Africa, such a one is a freak, a monstrosity, a darn fool, or a delectable vision. Have it any way you please.

Add to the very correct attire a man well accustomed to wearing it—and a monocle—and you will understand why these women, so long divorced from the finer refinements of social amenities, called the stranger a vision.

One of the natives finally escorted the stranger to one of the small tables; the next course was brought in, and the meal resumed.

An observer would have been interested to note the sudden change in the conversation and in the general deportment of the diners; and many a man looked at his wife with blank amazement as if he were witnessing a reincarnation, or had suddenly discovered his wife to be some one else.

LATER that evening the stranger came to the bar where the men had adjourned. His appearance was hailed by rude shouts of laughter, and ruder jeers.

"Here comes the dude. Watch him, boys."

"My! Ain't he the darlingest pet?"

The man paused, and with nonchalant air gazed dispassionately around the room.

"Pardon me, old chaps," he drawled, and screwed his monocle into place, "but do you see anything funny about me?"

As by a prearranged plan each miner put a make-believe monocle up to his eye. In some cases it was a watch-crystal; others had curtain rings, while the rest made shift with large silver coins.

A broad grin spread over the stranger's face; and, taking his monocle from his eye, he threw it into the air. He caught it on his cheek as it descended, and with a swift jerk of the head once more firmly fixed it in place.

"Now, old dears," he said with a chuckle, "let me see you do that."

A loud shout of laughter greeted this feat, but this time the laugh was with the stranger, not against him.

"That's much better," he continued. "Now we're a nice, jolly little party. Really, don't you know, I was feeling quite embarrassed. Won't you drink with me?"

"We like to know the name of the man we drink with," said one of the men.

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He was the owner of one of the mines.

"Ah! Yes, of course. Pardon the omission. But what's in a name? Suppose you call me the Major?"

"The Major?"

They all crowded around him.

They had heard—who had not?—much of this man who had made a laughing-stock of the South African Police; whose tricks and clever evasions of the arm of the law were the talk of the Dark Continent. None doubted that he was indeed the Major. Who else had that debonair carriage, that look—to a casual observer—of helpless inanity and an almost vacuous expression which only served as a mask to hide the keen wit of the man? Who but the Major would have had the nerve to appear at such a place and in such an attire?

The miners knew of the Major by repute. Knew that beneath the clothing of a fop was a red-blooded man; a man whose strength was always on the side of the under dog no matter how great the odds might be against him. They knew that he was, in the eyes of the law, a notorious criminal; but they also understood that his crime—that of illicit diamond-buying—was his protest against certain unjust laws protecting the diamond-mining monopoly. And their sympathies were all with him.

"But aren't you off your beat up here, Major?" asked one of the men. "We're gold-miners. You haven't got a grudge against us, have you? The Lord knows I hope not."

"You flatter me. Really. No, gold doesn't interest me. Some day perhaps I'll— But it's so beastly heavy to cart around. No. This is just my recuperating point, so to speak, before taking a trip into Mangwato's country."

At this time two Portuguese officials who were sitting at a table in a far corner of the bar looked at each other meaningly, and one of them rose quietly and left the room unobserved.

The Major turned to the barmaid, ordered drinks for the crowd and a moment later they were noisily drinking his health.

One round was quickly followed by another; and the Major entertained the miners by the story, not told boastfully, of his latest escapade.

In the midst of the laughter which marked the conclusion of the tale a young trooper of the Transvaal Mounted Police entered the bar.

The miners looked at him coldly, for Gilkerson was not popular. He was very young and full of self-importance—was apt to take a high-handed attitude.

He carried a police circular in his hand and glanced from it to the Major, then back to the paper again.

"You're the Major, I believe," he said at length.

"Quite right, old dear. Charmed to meet you."

The policeman ignored the Major's outstretched hand.

"I'd like to speak to you outside."

The Major raised his eyebrows.

"But it's so beastly dark, old chap, and there are mosquitoes, stink-flies and what not."

"It is a matter of business, Major."

His hand, the Major noted, rested on the butt of his revolver.

"My word! You mystify me."

The Major turned to the others.

"You'll pardon me, won't you?" he said.

"The law insists—and who am I to go against the law?—that I offer up my bloated carcass as a feast for the mosquitoes."

"NOW what is it?" the Major continued as he followed Gilkerson outside.

"I arrest you," he said in pompous tones, and stopped.

"Go on, old fellow; don't mind me. Complete the sentence. You know. Warn me that what I may say may be used as evidence against me, and all that."

Gilkerson hastily completed the formula.

"It's no laughing matter, Major," he added.

"I agree with you, old thing. Deuced serious, I should say—for you. I've been arrested so many times; and—well, I think I shall write a letter to your commanding officer commending you for the gentlemanly way in which you effected the arrest. Most considerate of you, I must say.

"But of course I shall have to bring a suit against the Government for false arrest. Yes. I must do that to protect my good name, don't you know."

The Major was enjoying himself immensely. He carried nothing incriminating upon him. As a matter of fact he had not

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made a deal in diamonds for some considerable time; and he knew that though they might arrest him on suspicion there was no case against him that would hold in court.

"Aren't you interested in knowing what the charge is, Major?"

"Not a bit, dear boy. Probably you have heard that I'm a nefarious highwayman or something of that sort, when as a matter of fact I'm the most law-abiding man in the colony. Really now, I mean that. Still, if it will ease your mind, what is the charge?"

"Murder."

"What!"

In his astonishment the Major allowed his eyeglass to fall from his eye, and it dropped to the ground. With an expression of alarm the Major went down on his hands and knees and groped around for his monocle. But all the time he was conscious that the muzzle of Gilkerson's revolver was not six inches from his head.

"I've found it," he said finally in relieved tones; "and, thank Heavens, unbroken.

"You know," he continued, rising to his feet and adjusting his monocle, "I'd be simply blind without this. Some chappies say that it is an affectation, but 'pon my soul it's not. It helps me to see things as they are. If you know what I mean.

"Well, what do you intend to do with me? And, I say, if it's not too much trouble I wish you would put away that beastly revolver. I'm quite harmless, you know, and revolvers make me deucedly nervous."

"Oh, come along," said Gilkerson impatiently. "You're as long-winded as an old woman."

"But where, dear boy?"

"To the police camp of course. I won't feel safe until I've got you under lock and key."

"But surely you don't expect me to go dressed like this? Let me change first."

"Is it likely? No. You'll do just as you are."

"At least let me talk to my native servant Jim."

"No. Now get a move on; and if you have any thought in your mind of trying to escape, just remember that my revolver is loaded and will be aimed right at your head. And I'm not a bad shot," he added complacently.

The Major shrugged his shoulders and walked down the dimly lighted street, closely followed by Gilkerson.

Five minutes later the heavy door of the tiny cell swung to with a bang, and the Major was imprisoned without hope of escape.

Next day the Major's arrest was the one topic of conversation in Georgetown.

The two Portuguese officials hastened to the police camp; and, having been assured by Gilkerson that the Major was really under arrest, charged with a serious crime, they hastily composed a message addressed to the Commandant of Portuguese territory.

One passage in that message is worthy of notice.

It read:

> Disregard news sent by special runner last night. The Major has been arrested for murder, and there is no reason to believe that he can in any way interfere with our plans.

For three days Gilkerson kept the Major under close confinement by virtue of—so he said—orders from Headquarters.

Further enlightenment he would not, could not, give; and, knowing the Major's reputation, he would not allow his prisoner to leave his cell under any pretext whatsoever. Neither would he allow Jim, the Major's Hottentot servant, to see his *baas*, threatening that loyal native with arrest should he continue to loiter in the vicinity of the jail.

He refused even to send to the hotel for the prisoner's baggage, so the Major was still wearing the evening dress he wore at the time of his arrest.

"You'll be more conspicuous, Major," explained Gilkerson with a laugh, "should you happen to break out of here. Not that I think that's likely. Still I prefer not to take chances; and it would be easy to trace a man wearing a dress suit."

"You think of everything; don't you, old top?" the Major had replied sarcastically.

Early on the morning of the fourth day following his arrest the Major was awakened by voices outside the door of his cell.

"That's all right," a familiar voice was saying. "You have acted wisely. Can't afford to take chances with this fellow. Now you had better be off to the mines. You understand what you are to do."

"Yes, sir," the voice of Gilkerson replied. "I'm to be on the lookout for a native answering this description: medium build, round-shouldered, and has a crescent-shaped scar on his right shoulder."

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"That's right. If you get him the case against the Major will be complete. And, Gilkerson, I'm up here unofficially, you understand. I don't want any one to know that I'm here."

"Very good, sir."

A few minutes later a key grated in the lock, and the door of the cell swung slowly open, admitting a man so like the Major in appearance that the two men might have been taken for brothers.

They looked at each other for a moment in silence, and then the newcomer burst into laughter.

"You do me too great an honor, Major. Really there was no need for you to have dressed for the occasion."

"You must thank your officious trooper for that, chief. I'll give you my word that I will never want to wear a dress suit again. But what's all this about? You are not playing the game, you know."

"Having you arrested for murder, you mean?"

"Yes. What else?"

The Major was slightly peeved.

"That's just what I am doing," retorted the "chief." "I'm playing the game."

"Oh, bosh. You have me arrested on a ridiculous charge and call that playing the game. Try again, old chap."

The other—he was the chief of police—sobered instantly.

"It was very important, Major," he said, "that I should see you—secretly if possible—and I've been trying to get in touch with you for some time; but you are as slippery as an eel. Consequently when I heard that you were making for Georgetown I telegraphed to Gilkerson that you were suspected of murder, ordering him to hold you until further notice."

"But why make the charge one of murder? You have given me some uneasy moments, I can tell you."

"I knew you would stay and face out such a serious charge, whereas you might have been tempted to make a bolt for it had the charge been a trivial one—I. D. B., for instance."

"Fat chance I've had of getting away. Gilkerson has been treating me as though I were a second Jack the Ripper or some other beastly cutthroat, and I'm not used to it. Other Johnnies who've arrested me have always treated me like a gentleman."

"Oh, you mustn't be too hard on Gilkerson. You are his first arrest, and the responsibility sets rather hard on him."

The Major shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course I shall sue you for false arrest."

"No, I don't think you will, Major. We need your help and I hope you will give it."

The chief's voice suddenly lowered; his face became serious; and the Major, realizing that there was something of importance afoot, dropped his pose of injured innocence and prepared to listen.

IT WAS late that night when Gilkerson returned from his errand at the mines. He was very weary and not a little dispirited, for his search had been fruitless. Though he had examined every native working at the various mines he had failed to discover the one he was after, and had come to the conclusion that his commanding officer had been misinformed.

As he came to his hut, which was in close proximity to the cell where the Major was incarcerated, he was surprized to find it in darkness.

Thinking it strange that his chief should have gone away leaving the prisoner unattended, he quickened his steps.

Entering his hut, he lighted a lamp and found on the table a letter addressed to him. He read:

DEAR GILKERSON:

I am very sorry that I shall not be able to say good-by to you, so I am taking this opportunity of thanking you for the kindness you have shown me, and all that. I trust that you will return early and release the chief at once. The old boy seems to be very peeved. I know he would swear if he could, but I flatter myself that I have gagged him very effectually.

And isn't it lucky that we are so alike in appearance, and about the same build?

You will understand, and why, when you see the chief.

Ta-ta, old man. Yours,

THE MAJOR.

Lamp in hand, Gilkerson rushed out to the cell. The key was in the lock, and, turning it, he flung open the door.

The light of the lamp shone on a man lying prostrate on the floor. For a moment Gilkerson thought the letter he had just read must have been a figment of his imagination. The man upon the floor was surely the Major! He wore the Major's clothes, and——

Then he saw that this man was gagged

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and was bound hand and foot by all the handcuffs and leg-irons with which Gilkerson was wont to adorn the walls of his hut.

With hands clumsy because of their eagerness Gilkerson took the gag out of his chief's mouth, and the anger that had been so long imprisoned at last found utterance.

"You —— fool!" he exploded.

"But how did he do it, sir?" stammered Gilkerson.

"Don't you search your prisoners, man? Didn't you know he carried a revolver?"

"I searched him, and I'll swear he had no revolver when I arrested him, sir."

"Well, he had one," growled the chief. "He held me up with it. For Heaven's sake don't stand there like a blinking idiot. Get me out of these handcuffs."

"Yes, sir. At once, sir."

But it was a long time before he could succeed in finding the keys to unlock them, and it was fully an hour before he had finally released his wrathful superior.

"I've a good mind to put you under arrest for neglect of duty," snarled that indignant man. "You're a fine specimen of a policeman! Fancy letting a desperate criminal like the Major retain a revolver!"

Gilkerson was silent.

He had hoped that his prompt capture of the Major would earn him a promotion. Instead it seemed that he was to be disgraced.

"Well! What have you got to say for yourself?"

"There's nothing I can say, sir, save to ask permission to go after him."

The chief snorted.

"What good would that do, you darned fool? The blighter is no doubt safe in Portuguese territory by this time, and thumbing his nose at us."

There was an ominous silence.

"Look here, Gilkerson," said the chief at length. "You don't show up very well in this affair, do you? For that matter neither do I. If this story gets out we'll be the laughing-stock of the country."

"That's true, sir," Gilkerson assented mournfully.

"And if it does get out I'll see that your chance of promotion is ruined forever. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I think so, sir."

"Very well, then. The train leaves for the south in an hour, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. You will, as soon as you have made the necessary preparations, escort me, the Major, to the station, announcing to any one who may see fit to question you that you are taking me to Johannesburg for trial.

"Have you a suit of mufti? You have? Good. Then bring it along with you. I can change as soon as we are on the train. As long as we can fool the people here into thinking that I'm actually the Major, and that you are taking me to headquarters for trial, I can manage the rest. Do you understand what I'm driving at?"

Gilkerson was busy packing his suit-case.

"Yes, sir," he said with a salute. "All ready now, sir."

The chief's voice changed to a drawl strangely reminiscent of the Major.

"That's fine, old dear," he said with a wink, and fumbled in the pocket of his coat. "Where is my bally monocle? Ah! Here it is. Now, I can see to follow you. Lead on, Macduff."

"No. After you, Major."

Gilkerson said it with a bow.

WHILE they were waiting at the station for the arrival of the south-bound train a man approached the pseudo-Major and, speaking with a foreign accent, asked him for a match.

"I'm sorry, and all that," the other replied, "but you see how it is."

He held up his hands so that the light of the station lamp fell upon his manacled wrists.

The stranger turned to Gilkerson and repeated his request.

"You have a dangerous criminal there; is it not so?" he asked as he lighted a cigaret.

"Yes. He's a murderer," replied Gilkerson. "I'm taking him to Johannesburg for trial."

"So? That makes me nervous."

He moved away, a little smile of triumph on his face.

About this time the Major was riding rapidly toward a camp-fire which twinkled in the darkness of the bush. It was across the river from Georgetown, and way off the beaten track.

As he neared the fire a dusky figure sprang to meet him.

"Scoff is ready, *baas*," joyfully announced Jim, the Hottentot.

"That's good. I'm deuced hungry, Jim."

He dismounted, washed, and a moment later was eating roast buck with the appetite

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of a man who has not a care in the world.

"It was well planned, Jim," he said in the vernacular to the Hottentot as he carved himself another slice of the sweet white meat.

"Without doubt, *baas*. Trekking will be easy for us two. A horse I have, and the wherewithal to get food."

"You mean ammunition, Jim?"

"Aye. That and gold, *baas*. There is much gold."

"So?"

"Yah, *baas*. But whither do we go?"

"Truly that is a matter to be thought on, Jim. Was nothing said to you?"

"Nothing, save that I should await you at this place."

"What if we go to Mangwato's country, Jim?"

"It would be wise. Mangwato would without doubt treat you with great honor. Did you not at one time preserve the life of a son that is dear to him? Aye, let us go there and dwell in peace for a time. I am growing old and like not this continual running from place to place."

"You are always free to return to your own people, Jim."

"Nay. The *baas* knows it was not that I meant. Some little I thought that some day perchance my *baas* would be caught in a net from which there is no escaping."

"You're a hoary old reprobate," the Major said affectionately in English. "But your words are wise. I too would know peace for a little while, so tomorrow we go to Mangwato's country."

SENHOR JOSÉ ALVARO, a portly little man, dressed in the gay and much bemedaled uniform of a high official in the Portuguese Colonial Service, looked up severely from his papers as a prison guard ushered two men into his office.

"Take off those handcuffs," he ordered, "and then leave the room. You may remain on guard."

In a soft voice, which somehow had a catlike purr in it, Senhor Alvaro requested the two men to be seated.

They exchanged wondering glances as they silently seated themselves.

"I have here," resumed the commandant, rustling some papers on the desk before him, "a complete, and very interesting, record of your respective careers."

"You, Senhor 'Dirty' Norton—" he turned to the taller of the two men—"were at one time, a sergeant in the Transvaal Police, but owing to certain unmentionable activities you were obliged to flee from the Transvaal and seek refuge in this territory. Since coming here you have lived up to your reputation. You are a card-sharper, a confidence man, a thief; and to complete your list of crimes you have committed a particularly cowardly and brutal murder. For that you were sentenced to be shot.

"Pray correct me if I am wrong, Senhor 'Dirty' Norton."

The big man was silent.

The commandant turned to the other, a scrubby little man known as "Cockney Joe."

"Of you we know even more. But what need to enumerate your many and varied crimes? Let it be sufficient to state that you are wanted very badly in England; that the police of the Transvaal offer a big reward for your arrest; and finally that you aided Senhor Dirty Norton in committing the previously mentioned murder. And you too were given the death penalty."

The two men moved uneasily in their chairs.

"The gracious governor of this colony," continued the purring voice, "has seen fit to show you clemency. But of course there are conditions."

"H'i'll promise ter be'ave, gov'nor," whined Cockney Joe. "H'i would never 'ave done nufink h'if h'it 'adn't been for Dirty 'ere."

The other man was silent. He was watching the fat, apparently good-humored face of the commandant.

"That's very nice of you—" the commandant waved his hands airily—"but perhaps you had better let me do the talking for a little while. Yes, Senhor Norton and myself will converse for a little while."

Cockney Joe lapsed into a frightened silence.

"What do you know of Mangwato's country?"

Senhor Alvaro looked intently at Norton.

"I know that he's reputed to have a big hoard of diamonds."

The commandant looked disappointed.

"Yes. You would know that," he said testily. "But is that all?"

"That's all."

"Then listen."

The commandant turned to a map which hung on the wall behind him.

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"Here—" he placed a pudgy forefinger on the map, thereby obliterating some few score square miles of territory—"here is Mangwato's country. You will notice—" removing his finger—"that it is tinted blue on the map, indicating that it is an independent state.

"It is bounded on the east by a patch of yellow and on the west, north and south by patches of red. Is it not so?"

Norton nodded assent, and Cockney Joe grunted something about "a blinkin' geography lesson."

"It is our desire to see that patch of blue—" again the commandant's finger obliterated a big section of Mangwato's country—"marked yellow on the map."

He paused impressively.

"Well, why don't you take it, *senhor?*" asked Norton. "It isn't likely that a native would put up any fight."

"Ah! That's where you come in, my friends," returned the commandant.

"You see," he continued in confidential tones, "the two powers have always adopted a hands-off policy as far as Mangwato is concerned. We have mutually agreed that any white man entering Mangwato's country should do so at his own risk; that no punitive expedition—the first step, you understand, toward annexation—should be sent against Mangwato should he kill any white men on his territory.

"Of course, if he crossed the border on a raiding party, that would be another matter. But he's too wily for that. He knows of this agreement and has made the most of it.

"His country is the only tract in South Africa as yet undeveloped by white men. And it is a rich country; rich in minerals, in farming-land and in labor. He has absolutely forbidden any white man to enter his country, hoping thereby to preserve the entity of his people. Not only that, but he has forbidden any of his people to seek work with the white men."

The commandant paused to light a black cigar before continuing.

"But that's soon coming to an end. Mangwato's getting old. He realizes now that it is not—as he used to boast—the strength and numbers of his fighting men that keep his country free from white men. He knows that sooner or later his country will come under the rule of the powers."

The commandant flicked the ash from his cigar and looked at Norton expectantly.

"What is it that you want us to do, *senhor?*" Norton asked.

"Ah! You are direct, my friend," said the commandant. "You would see the end of this wandering dissertation of mine. What you are to do is this. You are to induce Mangwato to appeal to us for protection. How you will accomplish this I don't quite know."

"But why send us? Why not send a representative of your Government?"

Norton was plainly puzzled.

"Don't you see that to do so would bring us in conflict with the British lion? It would be the breaking of our gentlemen's agreement, and we can't afford that.

"But if you two, having escaped from prison, elect to impersonate Portuguese officials that would be another matter. That you should go on hunting expedition along the frontiers of Mangwato's country might if known cause some apprehension; still, if the British happened to make pointed inquiries concerning you, we can disclaim all official connection with you, and, once given knowledge of your whereabouts, would speedily rearrest you.

"On the other hand, should you be successful in persuading Mangwato to come under our flag and without apparent official coercion on our part, well and good. The British lion could snarl as much as he pleased. With clean hands we could plead our cause before the Hague Tribunal, assured of a favorable verdict.

"Yet again. Should Mangwato kill you, ostensibly Portuguese officials on an innocent hunting expedition and on our soil, we would have good cause for sending a punitive expedition against him. And please believe that you would be well avenged."

"But what do we get out of this, *senhor?*"

"If you succeed and live, freedom and a large reward. If you fail— Let us not talk about failure, my friends. It is an unpleasant subject."

"But suppose we refuse?"

"In that case," said the commandant sorrowfully, "we shall be compelled, regretfully compelled, to carry out the order of the court. In other words, you will be shot."

Norton and Cockney Joe held a whispered consultation.

"We'll do it, *senhor,*" said Norton at length.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your

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good sense. But please do not think that we are giving you an opportunity to escape. We shall not for one moment lose sight of you.

"When you leave here we shall at once notify the British authorities that you have escaped from prison and were last seen heading for the Transvaal border. So, you see, we will be well protected, especially as the natives who accompany you will be instructed by me concerning their duties. Now I would like to make a few suggestions which you may follow or not, as you see fit."

TIME is no object in Africa, the "Land of Tomorrow," and fully six months had elapsed before Dirty Norton and Cockney Joe had formed a plan which would, they hoped, gain them the promised reward and freedom.

They had, as suggested by the commandant, pitched camp close to the borders of Mangwato's country, using it as headquarters from which they made hunting forays. Dressed with bright uniforms, accompanied by a large number of native carriers—also in uniform—they looked just what they purported to be; officials of the Portuguese Government on a shooting expedition.

They made no attempt to cross the border and enter the forbidden land, but had been content with the fact that their actions were being spied upon by Mangwato's warriors. That was well. It was establishing their identity.

For long months they had shirked facing the problem that was before them, unable indeed to see how they could carry the thing through. Then only the night before Fate had put the means of success into their hands.

Certain of their bearers had crossed the boundary line and had raided the crops of a near-by village. The marauders had been observed and chased back to the camp by angry warriors. One of the bearers was wounded in the thigh by an assegai.

The warriors all retreated, however, at the sight of the white men. All, that is, save one, and he proved to be very truculent, insisting that the raiders be given over to him for punishment.

"I am Shimba," he said proudly, "the only son of Mangwato the chief. It is not a light matter for men to raid my crops."

On hearing that he was the chief's son, Norton made many overtures of friendship, and finally appeased the warrior's wrath by offering him a drink of whisky.

A second and third drink quickly followed the first, and in a short time the man called Shimba was overcome by the stupor of drunkenness.

Norton quickly bound and gagged the drink-sodden native.

"Wot's that for, you blasted fool?" queried Cockney Joe.

Norton laughed.

"Why, Joe, that makes everything A 1 at Lloyds for us."

"H'i don't see 'ow."

"No, you wouldn't. Well, here's the lay. Tomorrow one of us with an escort goes to interview Mangwato. There'll be no trouble getting to see the old blighter when he knows we've got his son prisoner."

"Wot do you do then?"

"Tell him that if he doesn't request the Portuguese Government to form a protectorate we'll take his son to Lourenço Marques and have him shot, and will also send an expedition to punish Mangwato because he has allowed his warriors to kill our bearers."

"But suppose 'e claims that the killin' was done on 'is territory?"

"Is it likely? He knows his word won't go for anything against ours. We're two high officials of the Government, remember. Besides, there's his son. That's a big hold. He'll do anything for his son, so they say."

"Sounds h'all right," admitted Cockney Joe cautiously. "But oo's going? H'it ought ter be you. You speak the lingo; H'i don't."

"I'll go all right. Now let's sleep. I want to make an early start in the morning."

AS HE awoke the next day, another idea had come to Dirty.

"See here, Joe," he said. "I don't expect we'll get much of a reward even if we work the thing all right. What do you say if we lift old Mangwato's diamonds?"

"Lumme! You think of h'everyfink, don't yer? But 'ow?"

"It's so easy, Joe, that it's like taking candy from a baby. It'll remind you of the days you used to steal money from the kids on their way to the corner pub to buy their old man a pint of beer.

"You see," he explained slowly, so that

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Cockney Joe's lower intelligence might fully grasp the idea, "I'll tell Mangwato that we will be bound to shoot his son; that's the law. Then I'll let on that I hate to do it, but that I'm a poor man and the reward I get will be great.

"He's bound to think of offering me a reward not to take his son in to be shot. If he doesn't I'll hint. If the hint's no good I'll tell him plainly that he either hands over the diamonds or his son dies. See?"

"Lumme!" exclaimed Cockney Joe admiringly. "Yer does fink of h'everyfink."

"Well, I'm off now. Keep a good watch on Shimba. If he makes a getaway the game's all U-P."

Norton turned to mount his horse, but paused at an exclamation from Cockney.

"Look."

Following the direction of the pointing finger, Norton saw a horseman riding swiftly toward them.

"It's a white man," muttered Dirty. "A trooper of the Transvaal Mounted."

"Wot the ——'s 'e doin' 'ere?"

"I'm going to stay and find out," Norton replied grimly. "Have your revolvers ready, Joe, in case he tries any funny business. And if he talks to you let on that you don't understand the lingo. See? You're Portuguese. You don't speak English."

"BAI Jove, it's Gilkerson. What the deuce is he doing here?"

These words, almost echoing the exclamation of Cockney Joe, came from the lips of the Major.

That ubiquitous man was hidden from view in a thick clump of bush not a quarter of a mile from the camp of the two conspirators. His eyes were glued to a pair of powerful field-glasses.

"What is it, *baas?*"

The grizzled Hottentot sensed a note of annoyance in the Major's voice.

"I don't quite know yet, Jim."

Still watching through the glasses, the Major followed the movements of the approaching horseman.

"He's at their camp now," he muttered, "and he seems to be spinning them some yarn. Norton looks rather fed up about something. Gilkerson must have let the cat out of the bag, confound him.

"Ah! He dismounted. Evidently he's going to have scoff with them before coming on. Yes. There goes a native leading away Gilkerson's and Norton's mounts. Well, that gives me some little time to think."

He sat in silent meditation for a while.

"Yes. That will be the best plan," he said to himself. "I'll try it anyway."

Then aloud—

"Jim!"

"Yah, *baas.*"

"Go back quickly to the village and tell the warriors that I have need of them. There is need for haste."

"Yah, *baas.*"

Jim vanished silently into the shadows of the bush, and the Major resumed his watch.

Since his arrival in Mangwato's country six months previously the Major had accomplished many things. He was the only white man who had succeeded in winning the esteem of the old chief, and there was no honor too great for Mangwato to pay to the man who had been instrumental in saving his son from death.

Possessed then of Mangwato's gratitude, it had not been a difficult matter for a man of the Major's caliber to earn his esteem and confidence. As a result the Major was given a high place in the chief's councils, Mangwato deferring indeed to the Major in all things relating to the government of his people.

The major concentrated his keen wit, his uncommon understanding of native psychology into presenting acceptably the English form of colonial government to the natives, and because he was well versed in native lore and rarely made an unjust decision the natives openly, and Mangwato secretly, acknowledged that the English way was a good way.

Several times Mangwato had sought to learn the reason why the Major should take such an interest in his people.

"It is the way of the English, Mangwato. We are all meddlers."

"Such meddling has much of merit in it," the chief had replied sagaciously. "Tell me, are all men of your race like you?"

"Some better, some worse. Are all the cattle in your herds of like quality?"

"It is well answered. But I can weed out the weaklings from my herds; such a thing I could not do should your people overrun my land."

"Now," Mangwato had continued, "it shall be as the Great Spirits will it. No move will I make toward bringing the white

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men in. I will not go to your people, nor will I go to the Portuguese. I fear to choose."

"The choice may be forced upon you. It is for no idle reason that two of their people should stay for so long, and so near, your borders."

"I have given thought to that. I think they are but hunters. If it be otherwise I pray that death will come to me ere my people are betrayed."

THERE was a slight rustle in the bushes, and the voice of Jim interrupted the Major's reveries.

"The warriors are here, *baas*."

"That is good, Jim."

The Major raised his voice slightly.

"Can you hear me, O warriors of Mangwato?"

"Aye, lord."

The reply came from many men, not one of whom was visible, so cunningly had they secreted themselves.

"Then listen well. There is a game to be played."

"NOW if you are ready, *senhor*," said Norton, "we will go to pay our respects on Mangwato. You to seek the—ah—Major, and I to demand punishment of the warriors who killed my bearers."

"All right," Gilkerson replied curtly.

He was not entirely prepossessed by these officials of the Portuguese Government. The one who called himself Senhor Miguel Castello seemed all right, but the other, the one who professed to have no knowledge of English, seemed vaguely familiar; and surely he had heard him curse in very fluent English when a native spilled some hot coffee on his hands!

At that moment rifle-shots and the blood-curdling cries of natives on the war-path came from the thick patch of bush which marked the boundary of Mangwato's country, and a moment later a horseman emerged, and rode at a furious pace toward the camp.

A second horseman followed, and hard at his heels a party of warriors armed with assegais.

The watchers saw the warriors pull the second horseman from his saddle. Spears flashed in the sunlight; and the warriors, first brandishing their weapons at the fast retreating form of the first horseman, picked up their victim and carried him in triumph back into the bush, followed, as a dog will follow its master, by the riderless horse.

The shouts of the warriors died away. Only the thud of the oncoming horse broke the stillness.

"What's it all about?" Gilkerson said wonderingly.

"Can't you see?" Norton—alias Senhor Miguel Castello—cried triumphantly as the rider drew nearer. "It's the Major, the man you're after. He's been after Mangwato's diamonds, and they got wise to him and chased him out. Now he's heading this way, hoping to find protection."

"You're right, *senhor*," Gilkerson said excitedly. "I'm going to get under cover. If he sees me he might make a bolt for it."

Gilkerson entered the tent and waited in a fever of impatience for the Major's arrival.

"Well!" he heard his quarry exclaim a few minutes later. "This is a delightful surprize. I never thought I should meet you two old friends here."

Gilkerson did not catch the surly reply.

"Just my luck."

The Major was speaking again.

"Another day and I would have gotten the old duffer's diamonds. As it is I had to run to save my bloomin' skin. Poor old Jim! I'm afraid they got him.

"But what are you doing here? After the diamonds too? Let's join forces. I've got a bully play."

Again Gilkerson missed the muttered reply. Still he had heard enough to realize that his first impressions regarding these so-called Portuguese officials were correct. But that was not his business. He was after the Major—that was all he cared about.

"Will you chappies give me some provisions and ammunition and I'll try to make my way to the coast? No? Then I'll have to try my luck at the *kraals* on the way."

Through a rent in the tent Gilkerson saw that the Major was preparing to mount; and, leaving his tent, he said curtly:

"Hands up, Major."

The Major's hands shot above his head, a look of blank incredulity on his face.

"Gilkerson, by all that's holy!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Pretty evident, isn't it, Major?" replied Gilkerson as he walked up to the Major to relieve him of his rifle and ammunition.

"Now hold out your hands."

He snapped on the handcuffs.

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"That's right. You can mount now, and we'll be on our way."

"But you can't arrest me here, old dear," the Major expostulated. "This is Portuguese territory. You have no authority here."

"I'll take a chance on that."

Gilkerson turned truculently on the two pseudo-Portuguese.

Norton shrugged his shoulders. It was not likely that he would interfere in the arrest of a man who many times had frustrated his carefully thought-out plans.

"Come on," Gilkerson continued impatiently, "Mount!"

With an ill grace the Major obeyed the command; and Gilkerson, holding the reins of his prisoner's horse, led the way in the direction of Georgetown.

Dirty Norton and Cockney Joe watched them until they were hidden from sight in the thick bush *veldt*.

"Well, that's all right," said Norton with a sigh of relief. "I tell you, Joe, we can't go wrong now. Lord, what an escape I've had! Suppose the policeman hadn't turned up. I'd have been in a pretty pickle, wouldn't I? Me going to Mangwato and pretending to be a Portuguese; and all the time would have been the Major to give my game away."

"H'i thought the blighter was in clink. Whoh'ever would 'ave thought h'of 'im bein' h'up 'ere!"

"Didn't you hear Gilkerson say he escaped? Well, I'm off now. Don't forget what I said about keeping a good watch on Shimba."

ONCE out of sight of the camp the Major's horse became suddenly lame.

"I say," said the Major apologetically, "I do wish you'd let me have a look at my horse's foot. I'm afraid he's picked up a stone or run a thorn in his frog or something."

"I'll look at it myself," grunted Gilkerson. "You needn't dismount."

Swinging from his saddle, Gilkerson bent down to examine the lame foot. As he did so the Major leaped upon him, and the two men rolled over and over on the ground.

The Major, being handcuffed, was at a disadvantage, and in a very little while Gilkerson was sitting triumphantly on his prisoner's chest.

"Pretty smart, Major," he panted exultantly, "but not quite smart enough."

"No?" drawled the Major quietly. "But if you'll take the trouble to look around you you will see that you're in the deuce of a mess."

Without releasing his hold Gilkerson looked cautiously behind him, and was amazed to find that a party of warriors had crept unobserved from the bushes and were closing in on him. With another start he recognized that Jim the Hottentot was their leader.

He sprang to his feet and drew his revolver.

"Don't be a fool, Gilkerson," came the curt voice of the Major. "Haven't you any imagination? You thought Jim was killed, and now you see him leading these warriors. Doesn't that convey anything to your feeble brain?

"You thought that these warriors were after my blood. Ask them who I am. You speak the lingo, don't you?"

"Who is this man?" Gilkerson demanded.

"Our lord, the White-Induna," replied the warriors.

"What does it all mean?"

Gilkerson turned wonderingly to the Major.

"That's better. Take off these bally wrist-ornaments and we will talk a little while."

"First tell me," the Major continued a moment later, "why you're after me. Not officially, I'll swear."

"No. I've felt such a fool since you escaped that when I was given two weeks' leave I made up my mind to spend it looking for you. I thought I'd square myself with the chief. Instead I seem to have made an even bigger fool of myself."

"There was no need surely for you to worry. You took a prisoner to Johannesburg, didn't you? And every one thought it was me?"

"How did you know that?"

"I planned it, dear boy. Tell me, didn't you ever question the chief's explanation of my escape?"

"Yes. I couldn't understand how you managed to have a revolver, and— Tell me all about it, Major! That murder charge was a fake, wasn't it?"

The Major nodded.

"That was your chief's amusing way— he will have his little joke, bless his heart— of securing an interview with me. But I

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got even with him for that. He didn't want to be gagged and trussed up as you found him, but once I got one pair of handcuffs on him I had matters my own sweet way. And how the dear man did swear!"

The Major chuckled softly.

"You know that Mangwato's country is an independent state?" he asked suddenly. Gilkerson nodded.

"All right, then. The Secret Service Johnnies discovered that the Portuguese were conspiring to force Mangwato to ask them to form a protectorate, and your chief appealed to me to forestall them. He knew, you see, that Mangwato was friendly with me, and what could be more natural than for me to seek safety from arrest in Mangwato's country!

"The fake escape was necessary because I had told the chappies at Georgetown that I was going to Mangwato's country. Two Portuguese officials heard me, and we knew that they would be bound to be afraid that I would interfere with their plans—pardon me if I flatter myself—though as a matter of fact at that time I was ignorant that international politics were seeking to bottle up Mangwato."

"One of them told me that you were at the hotel," interrupted Gilkerson. "And in order to make sure I'd arrest you he said you were wanted for I. D. B. This, when I had a warrant against you for murder."

"Did he? Oh, that's rich! Well, to cut a long story short, I've been up here nearly six months and have succeeded, I'll flatter myself, in showing Mangwato that the British way of doing things isn't half bad. At the same time I've been keeping my eye on the antics of those two Johnnies back yonder."

"They're not really Portuguese, are they, Major?"

"Great Scott, no! One, Norton, used to be in the Transvaal Police and was kicked out. He's a real mucker. I have several scores to settle with him. Cockney Joe, the other man, has fully as many crimes to his credit as Norton."

"Norton and Cockney Joe! Why, they're both wanted! I can see that I shall have two prisoners to take back. That's something anyway."

The Major smiled at Gilkerson's outburst.

"But what are they doing here, Major?"

"Oh, they're the agents for the Portuguese Government. I imagine they were to be given a free pardon on condition they carried this thing through. I'm not quite sure how they mean to do it. But last night they managed to capture Shimba, Mangwato's son, and I think they mean to use him somehow.

"Norton was just leaving camp to play his hand when you appeared on the scene and told them that I'm on the job. And that put the whole business on the blink again."

"I seem to have played the fool all around," said Gilkerson bitterly.

"Oh, cheer up, old man. It's not your fault. I told the chief to let you in on the secret."

"Why didn't he? Didn't he trust me?"

"It wasn't that he didn't trust you. He only thought that you might not be able to act well enough. Well, there's no harm done. They think I'm safely out of harm's way this time, and unless I'm very much mistaken Norton's on his way to see the chief now."

"What are you going to do? Tell Mangwato he's an impostor?"

"No. That might settle this attempt; but how about the next? Suppose the Portuguese tried again? No. I want to discredit the Portuguese in Mangwato's eyes, not two men masquerading as Portuguese.

"Personally I don't care a tinker's curse whether the British get Mangwato's country or not; I'd rather see the old dear run it himself. But if it's to be a choice between British and Portuguese rule then I'm going to do all I can to help Mangwato choose right.

"Will you put yourself under my orders, old fellow?"

"Do you really mean that I can help?" Gilkerson asked.

"Yes. I take it that you will? Splendid! Then I want you to stay here until dark—say an hour after sundown—and then make your way back to the camp. Take Cockney Joe prisoner—never mind about the bearers; they're harmless—and bring him to Mangwato's *kraal*. I'm going to leave Jim and these warriors with you. I don't fancy there'll be any fighting—Cockney Joe's too much of a cur for that—still you'd better be prepared for anything. Oh, yes. And be sure to bring Shimba along with you. Cockney Joe's holding him prisoner, you know."

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"Very good, Major," Gilkerson said with a salute.

"Fine!"

The Major's hand went up in acknowledgment of the salute; and, mounting his horse, he rode swiftly away.

"His horse isn't lame now," Gilkerson mused aloud. "I wonder if I've done the right thing, or——"

"AND what if I give an order to my warriors to slay you?"

Dirty Norton looked around apprehensively at the grim-faced, huge-muscled warriors who lined the large enclosure. Each one held a broad-bladed stabbing-assegai in his hand, and it seemed to Norton that they threatened him.

He shuddered involuntarily, and, turning, faced Mangwato again.

He saw that the old chief despite his fierce words was greatly troubled; he seemed to have aged suddenly; his portly form slumped and there was an air of utter dejection about the man.

So, assuming a bold front, Norton replied:

"What would you gain if you killed me, Mangwato? My death would not save your son; and—rest assured of this—the vengeance of my people would be great. All your young men they would put to death, and your women folk they would sell as slaves."

Mangwato was silent; but from the warriors came the ominous cry of:

"Death to the white man! Let us kill him, O Mangwato!"

Mangwato raised his hands and the cries ceased.

"It may not be, my children," he said, "lest we bring down a greater evil upon us. I have for long years known that sooner or later this choice would be forced upon me."

Turning to Norton, he asked—

"What are your conditions for the release of my son?"

"First, O Mangwato," replied Norton with a new courage, "that you give me the diamonds. So shall your son be freed from arrest and the surety of death. Secondly you must send a messenger to the *kraal* of the white men, my people, at Lourenço Marques, praying them to come into your country and aid you to rule it."

"If I do these things will you promise to release my son and to deal gently with my people?"

"Aye. That I promise."

"You will swear it?"

"Aye. I swear it."

Norton's tone was exultant. He had hardly believed that victory would be so easily won.

Again he turned to look at Mangwato's warriors.

At that moment the moon emerged from a cloud and flooded the council-place with her soft light. The broad blades of the assegais reflected the light, and it seemed then to Norton that they were so many scintillating diamonds.

"White man," said Mangwato slowly, "this is a deep matter; not one to be settled in the winking of an eye. I would think over it for a little while."

"Are not all things clear? If you do not do thus and so, all things will happen as I have said. Yet to show you that I am just in all things I will grant you until the moon shines directly overhead. That much time, and no more, will I allow."

"That is but a short hour, white man, and I would hold speech with the White Induna—the rod upon whom I lean."

"Who is this white Induna? Much talk this night have I heard of him."

"Do you not know him? He is a white man even as you are, yet not as you are. He has an eye which he can take out and hold in the palm of his hand. When he talks it is as if sleep were still upon him; yet it is in my mind that that man never sleeps. Ah, he is a man among men, and wise in all things."

"He must mean the blasted Major," thought Norton. "If so, what was the Major running away for? Was that a fake? It would be just like him."

Norton was panic-stricken. It seemed that he had after all walked into a trap.

Then came the comforting remembrance of the Major, handcuffed, being escorted back to Georgetown by Gilkerson. He was sure that there was no fake about that arrest. Gilkerson was quite evidently in earnest.

"Your wait will be in vain, Mangwato," he said confidently. "That one will never come here again."

But even as he spoke he was conscious of a stir among the warriors behind him. Turning, he saw that they had opened up their ranks, leaving a narrow passageway leading from an opening in the stockade.

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Down this passage, dressed in a suit of immaculate white duck, swinging his monocle nonchalantly by a silken cord, came the Major.

Now and again he would pause before a warrior, and, putting the monocle up to his eye, scrutinize him carefully from head to foot.

It was for all the world like an inspection of a regiment by the commanding officer.

Norton, speechless with amazement, could only watch with mouth agape.

Nor until he had completed his inspection and had come out into the clearing beyond the warriors, did the Major affect to notice Norton.

"Ah! There you are again, dear old chap," he said in tones of well-simulated surprize. "'Pon my soul, we do meet in queer places. Where did you leave Cockney Joe? And where, where did you get that opera-bouffe uniform? It is simply priceless!"

Norton scowled.

"But you don't understand English, do you? Of course not. How stupid of me! French? No? Well, we'll use Mangwato's language. Who knows? We may set the fashion, and it may be the diplomatic language of the world."

The Major turned to the chief.

"Word came that you had need of me, Mangwato."

"Aye. A deep need, O friend of my people.

"This one—" he indicated Norton—"says that certain of my people, led by Shimba, my son, have killed his servants. My son he holds prisoner and says he will have him put to death unless I give him the diamonds, and send a message to his people asking them to come in and help me to rule."

"And what do you say?"

"I am minded to obey his commands, for my son is dear to me. Further, he hath sworn that with my consent or not his people will come to govern over me."

"But what if I tell you he lies? What if I tell you that your warriors did not kill his people?

"Heed well, and listen to the true story. Certain of his warriors raided the crops of your son and, he, hearing of it, drove them off. Then your son, even Shimba, went to the camp of these white men demanding that the thieves be punished. That is all, save that Shimba they kept a prisoner, holding him by trickery."

Mangwato rose slowly to his feet. His right hand held a toy assegai, the symbol of his rank.

The warriors watched him intently. The dropping of the assegai would be the signal for Norton's death.

"Is this a true word?" the chief asked Norton.

"It is a lie. But even so, even if it be a true word, what then? Your son's life I hold in the hollow of my hand. Have a care then what you do with me."

"That is true, that is true. I had forgotten that."

Mangwato slowly resumed his seat.

"There is no way out," he said mournfully to the Major. "If I would spare my son's life I must obey this liar, this trickster in all things. Aye, I call him evil names, for I am well convinced that the tale you tell me is a true one. Ah, wo is me that I must give my people over to the rule of men who achieve their ends by evil cunning!"

"Your son is a crafty warrior, Mangwato," said the Major. "It may well be that he has escaped. Listen! Once before this night I have heard the beating of the signal-drums. Now I hear it again. Listen, warriors, and proclaim its meaning."

A deep hush spread over the assemblage.

To their ears came the high, staccato notes of the signal-drum—Africa's primitive wireless.

"IT IS from Shimba's *kraal!*" cried one of the warriors.

"Aye, but the message?"

"Shimba journeys to the *kraal* of Mangwato. Two strangers—white men—are with him."

The Major turned smilingly to Norton.

"Gilkerson is bringing our mutual friend, Cockney Joe, here under arrest. Funny, isn't it?"

With a snarl of rage Norton leaped at the Major and hit him full on the jaw.

The Major reeled before the blow; but before Norton could follow up the blow he was seized and held securely by two massive warriors.

"I didn't think you had it in you, Dirty," said the Major, "and I'm beastly sorry and all that that I can't oblige you with a mill. But it isn't done, you know. We

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must preserve the dignity of the well-known superior race. Some other time when we're alone I'll be glad to oblige you."

Norton's response was a string of vile curses as he struggled furiously to break away from his guards.

"Be quiet, you fool."

The Major's voice cut like a whip.

"Don't you see that Mangwato's toying with his assegai. In another minute he'll give the signal that will mean your death. As it is I'll have the dickens of a job to save your life. Don't make it any harder."

Norton's struggles ceased instantly; and the Major turned to face Mangwato, who had been watching the two white men intently.

The shouts of joy which had hailed the news from the *kraal* of Shimba died away, and all awaited in silence for word from the chief. As they waited, the signal-drum from a near-by *kraal* beat out the news that Shimba and his party were but a short trek from the *kraal* of the chief, and when its notes had died away Mangwato addressed the Major.

"Again I have to thank you, O my friend, and friend of all my people. Again you have saved my son."

"Some little part I played, Mangwato. But not alone did I accomplish this. Another white man, a man of my race, a man high in the council of my people, wearing the dress of a chief, merits your thanks. He saved your son."

"He shall not be forgotten in the time of rejoicing. But what shall I do with this other one?"

Mangwato looked darkly at Norton.

"Death by the spear would be showing him too great an honor. First he must know pain."

"Give me his life, Mangwato. It is but a little thing to ask."

"And is it all you ask?"

"All. And it is but a little thing."

"True. Then I give him to you. Let him be taken away and guarded closely until you have made known your wishes concerning him."

As the warriors were about to lead Norton away Mangwato ordered them to wait.

"It is well," he said, "that one should see this."

"Hear me, O, my people," he cried. "Long have I known that the time would come when I must make a choice between two tribes of white men who sought to rule this land of mine, and but a little while ago it seemed that an evil choice was thrust upon me. And it would have been evil to have made our rulers a people who won that honor through lying and treachery. You know well who kept the evil from us, who restored my son to me. Long has he dwelt among us, and he has been at all times the rod upon which I leaned. He has taught me many things, and through the knowledge you have gotten from him you have made the crops to flourish, the herds to put on fatness.

"Nor is this all. He has ever been at my right hand when I sat in judgment. When I would have pronounced a sentence of death upon one of you he has counseled a more merciful way; aye, a better way. It was he——

"But what need for more words concerning him? He is well known to you all. What say you?"

"Aye, chief. He is a man of single heart; there is no evil in him."

"And you find no fault with his dealing with you?"

"None, lord."

The answer came with a mighty shout.

"After you, he is first in our hearts."

"Then I go to the English, for his way is their way, begging them to come and rule over us as they see fit. What say you now?"

"Your words sound good to our ears, O Mangwato. We are well content."

"It is well. Now I go to meet my son."

A FEW days later Mangwato, escorted by a party of picked warriors, set out on his mission to the British authorities.

Gilkerson accompanied him as far as Georgetown. He had two prisoners—Norton and Cockney Joe, both of whom preferred to face the Transvaal courts rather than the wrath of the soft-voiced, smiling Senhor José Alvaro.

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A FOUR-PART STORY
Conclusion

Sorcery and Everhard

By Gordon Young

Author of "From Behind Masks," "Blackmail," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

THE report that I, Don Everhard, had been murdered in Pittsburgh reached me while I was looking for Hurgronje in San Francisco. Hurgronje was a magician who had used his "magic" to murder my friend Madame Kraschenin and steal her jewels. I had recovered the jewels; now I was playing my cards craftily to "get" Hurgronje while he still believed I had been murdered by one of his gang.

My quest brought me into the apartment of a foppish crook, "Lord Bob" Calversley. I sat there alone about midnight when Zoronna Symondi, Sorceress, rushed in.

Zoronna was in trouble. I knew her anxiety was caused by Hurgronje, for he had her in his power. I went with her in a limousine to her apartment.

I had no sooner arrived than the door-bell rang. I slipped behind a screen, and one of Zoronna's lovers, Remy Cantello, entered.

His conversation with Zoronna was that of a lover crazed by jealousy. He embraced her, and when she pushed him aside the screen fell. I faced Remy with my coat and hat pulled about my face and a gun in each hand.

I went through Remy's pockets and took much jewelry, pretending that I was a burglar. I forced Zoronna to bind Remy, and I bound and gagged Zoronna, but lightly. Then I left the room.

IN MY subsequent conversation with Lord Bob I tried unsuccessfully to learn more of Hurgronje. But Lord Bob cleverly evaded my questions. Only when I poured my jewels on the table did he appear to be interested. Then the telephone rang. It was Zoronna. She insisted on seeing Lord Bob.

I went early that night to Zoronna's apartment.

Finally Zoronna came in, accompanied by Remy Cantello. I hid. Remy began his love-making, but a knock at the door drove him into hiding. I hoped the newcomer was Hurgronje. But instead Lord Bob sauntered in.

Zoronna told Lord Bob that she was in Hurgronje's power and suggested that they use me as a tool to kill Hurgronje. Lord Bob would not consent to this. He would not betray a friend like me. Then Lord Bob, too, began to make love to Zoronna.

It happened in a flash. Remy burst out of his hiding-place and the next second he was lying dead on the floor. Zoronna clasped a small blood-stained dagger.

The next day, while the police were hot on the murder-clues, I set out to locate my old friend, Madame Hazel Guigane, in the Chinese quarter.

IN SPITE of numerous obstacles I ferreted out Madame Guigane at her secret "establishment." I asked her to give refuge to a girl. She consented. She did not know it was Zoronna.

Later on I saw Lord Bob again. He told me that Zoronna lived in fear of Hurgronje and wanted my aid. I decided not to commit myself. During the course of our conversation Lord Bob said that he was going the following night to smuggle something from Hurgronje to Sin Chang, opium merchant. Hurgronje did not know what smugglers the Chinaman had chosen.

The next evening I went with Lord Bob in his motor-boat down the bay. The police were on the lookout, and we had a narrow escape from them. Hurgronje's package was a large statue of gold. We managed to deliver it to the Chinaman's place.

The day after, Madame Guigane called up. She had been talking to Sin Chang and learned that Zoronna had arrived at his house inside a large statue.

This news excited Lord Bob greatly. He set out for Sin Chang's at once. As no word came from him after a long wait, I resolved to find out the trouble. I gained admittance to Sin Chang's house, and made him an offer without delay.

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CHAPTER VIII

THERE was—or else I imagined it; probably I imagined it—a little sound like the sharp intake of breath behind me. But I could not look around; I had a full-grown Chinaman to watch.

Presently he said—

"I fear there has been a mistake, my friend."

There was menace in that quietly spoken sentence. Perhaps he was not sure whether or not I was some Federal hair-brain who had used bold means of getting evidence; perhaps he glimpsed something of the truth.

I assured him as quietly as I could that there *had* been a mistake, a great mistake; and I mentioned the statue with the living heart. That told him enough.

But he made no move; he showed no surprize. My fingers went just an inch deeper into my pockets.

In his same quiet, steady, peaceful, deliberate tone he said that he did not believe that he had the pleasure of knowing who I was. I told him.

"Then you carry with you the secrets of the dead?" which also told me obliquely that he knew something of me.

I put the situation bluntly before him. I would pay. The girl must be released. As far as he was concerned there would be nothing more said or done.

I had never before offered to bribe anybody into doing what I wanted done; that is, when I felt that it should be done. But I was not looking for trouble. I did not want it.

He sat thoughtfully for a moment, then asked me to come up and take a chair near him so we could talk better and more intimately. I was very well satisfied with where I stood; so, not disagreeably at all, I said there was no reason for further talk. It was simply a case of acceptance—or refusal.

"And if the statue of the living heart is above price?" he asked.

"It isn't. Not my price."

He was trying to keep the situation one of mere words. I changed all that abruptly. I told him that there was no other way out: The girl must be taken from the house, taken to a certain hotel, and from that hotel she must write a note back to me, showing that she was there, and the note must be signed also by the clerk. That I would wait—"and so will you, Sin Chang. You will wait right where you are. You may signal the lights to go out. You may have some one shoot from behind the curtains. You may do all those things and others—but none of them can be done so quickly but that you will have ceased to care what happens."

At that the gun in my left pocket slipped its nose up from under the flap.

His eyes shot past me for a second. They undoubtedly signaled to Plum-Blossom, or meant to. But at once he was looking at me again and smiling. I had come on an errand where I was not wanted; the maiden herself chose to remain in the house of Sin Chang. San Toy—meaning the one whom I have called Plum-Blossom—would herself bring in the beautiful Night Flower that my own ears might hear. Then I could go in peace.

He admired a brave man, even a brave foolish man. Let me come and sit near him, and from there listen to what the Moon Daughter herself would say.

A good axiom is, when in doubt never do what a Chinaman wants you to do. That was the second invitation to come and take a seat near him—so I stood where I was.

I told him that the choice offered him was one of full pay for the woman or a quick journey on the back of the black dragon.

That he should be obstinate was surprizing. I had really expected nothing more than that he would deny all knowledge of Zoronna—it is the usual Chinese method. Then—I felt that the jewels, or many of them, belonged to her anyway—I would have pretended not to doubt his word, but would have offered the jewels, saying that if by any miracle I should suddenly learn that she was at a certain hotel—in the way already mentioned—I would be so overjoyed as to make him the present. Such circumlocutions appeal to the Chinese imagination. I then would get out easily enough by having Sin Chang personally conduct me—Lord Bob and Jackman too, were to be included—Sin Chang to be about two feet in front with a gun-barrel against his spinal column. All of which may appear a little unusual perhaps, but not at all perilous.

He began to say something to San Toy; but I cut him short, requesting that he use English, which he spoke delightfully and

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most precisely. That was the first thing that made him angry, but he came very nearly not showing it.

The next was when I suggested—and both guns had crawled from my pockets—that he come down and stand by me, since it seemed to make him unhappy for me to be at such a distance.

He did not move.

Silence—then a sudden rush, a something of sound behind me.

I wheeled and shot; and a man died in the air, even as he left his feet with arms out-thrown to grasp and pin mine to my sides. Some Chinese athlete, I suppose, for though he was not big he was quick, and the boldness of the attempt was what made it almost successful.

Sin Chang knew that in no other way could he escape; that is, I could have been shot in the back of the head but the reflex action of the muscles would have sent the bullets straight. Only by shoving me to one side and pinning my arms was it possible to make sure that my aim would not be true.

There was another way. If a bullet had broken my wrists my hands would have been helpless, but that would have taken good shooting.

The gun roared deafeningly. There were screams and squeals. I had wheeled sidewise and shot, and instantly faced back again.

"Down in that chair, Sin Chang!"

He had no more than half-risen, and back he sat.

I quickly backed over beside the big wooden box, which did something to afford shelter. At least I was protected on one side by it, and my back was against the wall.

There was confusion all through the house, though the room we were in was not invaded—unless shapes moved in the shadows and behind the furniture too far away to be seen. But the curtains stirred, and the squealing and jabbering went on. Then in the midst of that, faintly, almost supernaturally, it seemed, I heard a familiar voice far away:

"Good boy, Don!"

There were other words that I did not catch. It was Lord Bob's voice, but I could not locate it. It seemed to come from under the floor.

But I had no time to be meditative. I heard a faint rustle near me, and edged away slightly from the box. I could not—or I did not want to—take my eyes off the Chinaman, silent, quiet, but furious, really pinned by fear of my guns to that big chair on the platform.

THERE was not much space between the big chest where I stood and the wall, but I really did not dare take the time to turn and peer at whatever was moving there. Holding one gun steady on the Chinaman, who watched with the emotional intensity of a serpent, I thrust the other between the chest and wall, ready to shoot.

A little musical squeal and fearful protest:

"No, no shootee. I lour flen', San Toy."

She whispered it, but the whisper did not convince me.

"Get out of there," I told her. "Get out."

I really ought to have shot. There was a pause, movement, then a sharp blow at my forearm. The sweet little butterfly had talons. She had slashed with a knife.

Even then I did not shoot. I jerked my arm up. It was not badly hurt, just a faint sting.

So much was going at once, and almost immediately so much else developed, that it is impossible to do more than suggest the situation. There was agitation all about, but a sort of muffled confusion; the running of padded or bare feet; the babel of lowered but excited voices; movement and bustling—a confusion that gradually grew louder as—I suppose—more and more people were attracted.

I had stirred up more than I counted on, but that was all right. That yellow gentleman twenty or twenty-five feet away would be likely to give me a passport before I was done, or if not some one else would.

I warned him again that the instant the lights went out he was a dead man, and he screamed something in Chinese that may or may not have been orders against touching the lights, which could not be easily extinguished, for there were lamps and lanterns scattered about. But I had figured that a concerted rush would result in enough darkness to handicap me; and those Chinamen—that one in particular—evidently knew enough to realize that my threat was not empty.

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I tried to keep my head clear and think steadily. I do not usually grow rattled; but this was rather extraordinary, and I had to think of many things at once.

The most important was, of course, the large yellow man on the wonderful chair. He was excited, though he did not show it except when he had fairly shrieked a few words in the forbidden language, and I cut him short. He sat quiet, but scarcely motionless; for he shifted position a few times, but kept his eyes steadily on me.

I had Lord Bob in mind, too. Also Zoronna. The situation was too complicated for, strictly speaking, anything like comfort; but I must insist that it was not anything like nearly as perilous as may be supposed, simply for the reason that I would shoot to kill and everybody knew it; and the more impressive reason that I was not likely to shoot without killing.

Numbers count for very little in this world unless the superior numbers are inspired by the dignity of law; that is, if a handful of policemen have a man in a corner they have at their backs, sustaining them, the whole of society and the principle of Law. Other men who crowd a person—and I have been crowded at times—do so for their own personal safety or for revenge, hot and terrible motives, but like a furious fire likely to burn out quickly.

I was just ready to call out to see if I could not get an answer from Lord Bob when there broke out suddenly at the end of the big box which bulwarked me from two entrances a shrill racket, hysterical voices, and a clatter and clash of scuffling, a few high, wild oaths, and a sudden burst of sound for all that I could have imagined like a troupe of damned women protesting at the gates of hell. But one of the voices was that of Madame Guigane, and she called my name.

I did not go around the big cabinet. I strained against it and moved it some inches, a foot or more farther from the wall, and in doing so—being engaged in that and at once alert to see what could be going on around there—I took my eyes from the fellow in the chair. He made a frantic leap, and his feet must have caught in his long robe, for he stumbled, slipped, fell, landed on the steps leading to the platform, rolled over—and before my eyes vanished downward through the floor, taking the rug with him. I understood why he had tried to get me to advance across the floor to the platform. Also I knew just about where Lord Bob and Jackman were.

I could easily have shot between the time he had tripped and the time he disappeared; but naturally I thought that I could make him reseat himself. I did not want his corpse on my hands any more that he wanted me to have it; but a certain astonishment, a sense of unreality, may have checked the leveled gun as he went through the floor in the twinkling of an eye. He had not intended to go, for his face was expanded by an astonishment if anything greater than my own.

But in telling of that as if it were the only thing at the moment to think of does not begin to convey the situation. At a glance I had seen Madame Guigane, like a fury, shaking and beating the little scorpion—I have changed the simile from butterfly—of a Chinese girl; and by her side was another woman whom for an instant I mistook for another Chinese; but she was Zoronna.

Across the top of that cabinet I fired, almost point blank at the head of Madame Guigane—with scarcely more than a hand's breadth to miss—which was quite enough—for the half-naked Chinaman darting with uplifted knife through the doorway had to be reached. He was. His eyes had been on Madame Guigane, who was like a witch in a rage; though the three women were mingled in their struggling.

The roar and roaring echo of the gun instantaneously held them motionless, but only for two ticks of a watch's beat, or some such fleeting time. Then I saw Zoronna wrest the knife high from the Chinese girl's tiny, but incredibly strong, fingers, and Madame Guigane flung her to the floor.

I shouted, and the two women came quickly between the cabinet and the walls to where I was. Madame Guigane was breathless and trying to talk. She was excited. Her blood was. She swore with feeling and not wholly inappropriately—but even with her eyes glaring and the words tumbling she felt of her wig, and unconsciously adjusted it as well as she could without a mirror.

The last moment I had seen her she had been reaching to tear it off. There is no understanding women.

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HAZEL GUIGANE was especially incomprehensible, even for a woman. After I had left, she had decided to visit Sin Chang's and see Zoronna for herself, perhaps get her out if possible. Madame Guigane was nearly an intimate of the household. Sin Chang favored her with his friendship. She had been in the women's quarters for some time and had talked with Zoronna. She had learned that I was in the house—or she recognized that it was I by what she heard—and was not, she afterward said, much surprized.

At the first shot, she and Zoronna—who had learned enough to reassure herself toward me somewhat—had made a bolt. They found the passage that Madame Guigane had expected to use, blocked. They came into the large room. They had come upon San Toy crouching behind the cabinet, a knife in her hand.

"SIN CHANG'S got away," I said. "We may be in for it."

"That wasn't Sin Chang," Madame Guigane shouted. "He isn't here—hasn't been here all day. Nobody knows where he is.

"I could've talked to Sin Chang. He'd have sense enough to let her go—or I'd put sense enough in his head."

She was truculent, and there was not a stain of frightened blood in her.

Of course I insisted that she tell me again that the man on the chair had not been Sin Chang. I forget what name she gave him—Sat-something; a fellow high in Sin Chang's organization. Sin Chang was fat, so fat he could hardly waddle.

Sin Chang had some sense, too. She could have argued with him; and she couldn't imagine what these fellows had been up to. There were two of them, brothers. Bad fellows. She had never liked them.

She rattled on, and intermixed with her sentences were reproaches for my foolhardiness, scoldings for having run away from her, an occasional sharp epithet for the yellow devils, and the quite careless assurance that I would never get out alive. She did not believe me when I said that Sat-something-or-other had fallen through a trap door—and I pointed. She had not known of a trap there. She had been across it a dozen times; but the rug was gone, and the outline of the false floor—some eight feet square—could be seen.

Madame Guigane peered around the corner of the cabinet, expressing the hope that she had killed that "little yellow devil," who, I understood, was the wife of one of the Sat brothers.

I did not have much time to look at Zoronna, but every time I did glance at her her eyes were fixed on me; tawny, vivid eyes, filled with a kind of grim wonder. She was an unreal sort of person, even at my elbow—the only woman I ever saw whose personality seemed no less magnetically mysterious, fascinating an arm's length away than amid the cunning lights and scenery of a stage.

Except for her short, nearly curling hair, one could easily have mistaken her for a Chinese girl. Her eyes were faintly slanted, and in the long, embroidered purple tunic with the enormous sleeves, edged and worked heavily with colored silk, she seemed a daughter of the race whose costume she wore.

Her hands, exceedingly long and slender and white, did not hang at her side. There was nothing listless or weak about her. One hand, with the sleeve pushed back, rested on her hip. The other hand was poised across her waist, and in that she held the slim knife wrested from San Toy.

And all about us there was a muffled clamor and excitement. The curtains shook from passing bodies or hands that pulled a corner aside to peer through; but no one came in sight. There were shouts as of orders, and scrambling and bustle, with short lulls, but no silence.

Madame Guigane peered about her watchfully. One of her earrings was gone. Her dark, tight-fitting velvet suit was torn, in a place or two slashed; but she was indifferent to her appearance, except for an occasional mechanical touch of the wonderful golden wig. Disconnected sentences came in flurries from her:

"Why don't they show their ugly heads?. . . . Sin Chang's a fool. . . . What the ——'s in this cabinet? I've always wanted to know. . . . Don, you're a fine fellow, you are—get me into this mess. . . .

"Look! Over there—shoot 'im! Get back, you yellow snake! . . . Bet they blow us up or something. . . . What'd you s'pose is in this box? . . . Scared, kid?"

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That to Zoronna!

"Well, *I* am. . . . Oh, look!"

She had pulled open one of the cabinet doors, and was fingering delightedly little balls of a dirty color that seemed to be covered with straw and leaves. Sin Chang's private stock of opium! She said that she was glad to find it. The liar—he had said that he was out of *Fuk Lung*. Whatever that might be. A choice grade of opium, I supposed.

"I've got somethin' to throw at 'em anyway," said Madame Guigane.

And in an exultant, destructive spirit she began emptying and scattering the contents of the cabinet.

I was watching right and left, the two automatics poised at my hips. I wondered if hatchetmen were being gathered. Hatchetmen they are called, I believe, to this day, though gunmen and knifers they were; also users of gas tubes and poisons.

I had pulled and rolled a big bronze vase to flank me protectively on the left. We were fairly well sheltered. Besides, Chinamen are wretched shots. Consider the roaring and fusillades of tong skirmishes—and the few dead and wounded left in the street.

A hand touched my shoulder, and Zoronna, her voice clear but trembling slightly, scarcely more than whispered—

"Why—why—why have—have you done this—for me?"

I suppose that she had tormentingly puzzled over it as long as she could, then ventured the question. I put one of the guns between my knees, but did not turn or look at her.

For one thing I was cautiously watchful. For another it was a little too quiet for comfort behind those curtains and walls—suspiciously quiet.

With my free hand I reached into my pocket, brought out an enlarged photograph and passed it over my shoulder to her. I started to say—

"This may explain——"

But I was interrupted. Instead I shouted, "Down!" and, catching the other gun, dropped to my knees, and two streams of lead went from my hands straight across the wide room, where through the curtains I had seen guns come, and almost at once the dazzling spurt of flame. The bullets clattered high and low, zipped and plunked from ricochets; the roar and reverberant echoes were ear-stunning.

True, I had no visible targets—or none until hit men, jumping and writhing, moved the curtains of the doorway. But they might as well have shot with eyes shut. Some of the more cautious poked guns around the corners, and, the battle having started, a kind of sniping was tried. That was not wholly satisfactory. The women might be hit, and as I tried to crowd them behind the cabinet—which had a good deal of protecting thickness—I heard sobbing. It was Zoronna. She had the picture hugged to her breast.

I then tried sniping a few snipers, not wholly with success. Some ten yards from us, high on the wall, was a bright bronze lamp. It shed too much light. I took a moment's careful aim—for I did not want to scatter oil and add fire to our troubles—and the light went out. That increased dimness helped to make our position a little more endurable.

Then—well—some Chinaman had crawled into the room, got himself behind the far side of the platform, and opened fire with an automatic shotgun. It has always been rather a matter of pride with me to return any man's fire face to face. In that I have been sustained perhaps by a certain fatalistic calm, though perhaps more so by the conscious knowledge that few men can possibly be as quick or as accurate as I.

But an automatic shotgun is something I had not met before, and I fairly shrank to smaller dimensions as I huddled behind a curve of the large bronze vase's belly—and the shot tore all around, and tore into, and sometimes through, that thick metal. But like most automatic shotguns, though what is called "sawed off," it had too close a bore for the buckshot to scatter at that close range.

Three or four times that fellow fired. Then paused. The roaring echoes vanished, and all was quiet—the hush after a storm, or at least it seemed so, for my ears were nearly numbed.

I fell over on my side with as near a death-gurgle as I could make. Madame Guigane screamed and leaped up to bend over me—and I saw the faint gleam of metal rise with a dark shadow from the far edge of that platform, and the big man pitched forward into the light, falling and twisting like a rabbit hit when poised to jump. The gun clattered dully on the platform rug. I had

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never sent three bullets more rapidly or earnestly than I sent those.

He lay on his side, his face to the light. It was the face of the Sat brother who had met me so impressively and with such chill, silent evilness had given me a perhaps unintentional warning of his displeasure.

There was an unnatural quiet through the house, a silence except for the sobbing of two women. One was behind me—Zoronna, her head still bent to the picture. The other was louder, shrill, full of abandoned anguish; San Toy, butterfly and scorpion, must have loved dearly the big evil Chinaman, dead on the broad dais, and lying almost beside the large chair from which his brother had tumbled through the trap.

SEVERAL times I had, through the long hour in that room, called for Lord Bob. But no answer had come. That troubled me much. He had to be taken out of that house with me, of course.

How I was going to get out was something that also began to be an intruding question. I could not even make the attempt—a fighting attempt—with those two women. But I had plenty of shells. I decided that I could and I would make those Chinamen give hostages and accept a truce before I was done—if no more shotguns were brought into play.

All this while Madame Guigane, with a broken arm, her dress tattered, was trying to nurse me, who had not even a scratch—except the slight one San Toy had put on my forearm. Also she had thought Zoronna's sobs, now being smothered, came from wounds. She scolded and swore with a mixture of harshness and tenderness. Her own arm was painless, she said.

"It's nothin'—I'm used to worse hurts, Don."

What she meant by the sudden sobriety, the sincerity of that last phrase, I do not know. Zoronna was trying to ask me something about the photograph. I caught the word "mother," but without looking around I said, "No," and asked if she had ever heard of a Madame Kraschenin?

"Krascheninkoff!"

Her voice rose quickly with an almost hysterical accent.

"Countess—my—my—sister!"

The last word was smothered.

"Hurgronje killed her. She was my friend."

I said it with brutal abruptness perhaps. But I had no time to be gentle. It was well to have it out and over with. I was watchfully suspicious of what might develop where so much seemed to be going on; a moving about and—to make a rather frantic effort at the impression—a sort of invisible cloud of feverish, but repressed, chattering.

Only the wailing voice of San Toy reached out uncontrollably. In a way it was as if others, in respect for her sorrow, were quiet; but I knew very well there was no such delicacy among the crowd out there, out of sight.

Zoronna's voice for one moment had been raised in a scream at what I told her. Then, too, she was almost silent, but weeping.

FAR away I heard my name called anxiously. I shouted back. I had the feeling that Lord Bob had somehow discovered the secret of invisibility, for by the sound of his calling, eager voice he was coming along some passage outside of the room—though the passages, I knew very well, were filled with people.

Presently through the doorway he came, he and Jackman, but not alone. Jackman held a knife under the jaw of the impersonator of Sin Chang, the Sat fellow, whose splendid robes were ragged and rumpled. A strip had been torn away to bind his hands. Lord Bob was rattling away in Chinese with a slip now and then into English; and he came with a cocky assurance, a sort of exuberance, that was altogether amazing.

"I tell you," Lord Bob shouted in English, throwing a hand across the room, and evidently repeating what he had been saying in Chinese, "that man is a devil—a real devil. You miserable sons of tree-toads, he eats flames and his stomach digests lead. Talk to 'em Sat; talk to 'em."

Lord Bob was not calm, and not gay. He was hysterical. What it must have cost him in effort to train himself to the repressed rôle of a bored fop I can not begin to guess.

He was hysterical and bluffing desperately. The man had tumbled through the trap into his hands, and he was using him as a hostage. Being gifted with facility in Chinese he could talk directly.

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What had happened was this: The two brothers were the only persons of real authority remaining in the house. The one was dead. The other was a prisoner and hostage.

Chinese are helpless as all Asiatics are without their traditional leaders at hand; initiative in daring is something they do not have—they must be directed always in unusual circumstances. Their tong groups will make bitter war one day, and be brothers the next when the leaders so order.

Lord Bob knew a great deal about the Chinese psychology—and he had not ventured out of the room below, into which he had tumbled, until he heard that the other brother was dead. Some messenger had shouted it through the door to the trapped Sat.

Lord Bob overheard them calling me a "devil," not in the English significance but earnestly; and Lord Bob swore that it was so. They could not believe that luck had kept their shower of bullets out of me; that fortune, they guessed, was the benefit of magic.

He and Jackman with their prisoner had been followed into the room by an unpleasant crowd, unpleasant of feature, though each seemed a stolid and scarcely interested spectator. There appeared to be any number of them, of all ranks and conditions.

Every Chinaman in the block, perhaps most of them in many blocks, must have boiled up the labyrinthine passages—a motley assortment, picturesque in a way, grotesque in another, and something to furnish nightmares for people who sleep uneasily. A hundred pair of black beady eyes stared unblinkingly through the dim light, stared from faces like old and dirty ivory, some of which had been carved by a sardonic artist.

They stood with hands in sleeves, folded across their stomachs—much like a drilled stage crew—and no doubt in every sleeve was gun or knife. Perhaps not. It may be that my fancy grows unduly vivid in recalling that scene.

We waited while Lord Bob explained, and in the names of their own gods cursed them. I have often wondered if it is really true that Asiatics are impressed and made humble by abuse—the lower class of them, that is. I have noticed that the people most familiar with them invariably do use furious abuse and curses. Perhaps immemorial centuries of despotism have made it so. Lord Bob had the very great advantage of being able to address them in their own language, in their own vernacular.

When he paused it seemed to me that not a face, but every eye, moved—moved the slightest fraction of an inch; and the beady gaze rested on the face of the luckless Sat, who stood not without a certain dignity in his humble condition with the grim Jackman's knife still less than two hairs' breadths from the base of his jaw. I hoped most fervently that no nervous alarm would cause him to strike, for with Sat stabbed it would undoubtedly have taken a great deal more than Lord Bob's tongue to get us out.

Sat spoke briefly. It was evidently an acceptance. To my amazement Lord Bob told Jackman to remove the knife, to cut the binding about the Chinaman's wrists.

"We pay blood-money," said Lord Bob to me. "You're treasurer."

I protested. He explained that it had to be—else there would be no end of trouble. Relatives—and it was, he said, strange how many relatives murdered men always had—would get a share, and console themselves with the knowledge that death comes to all men; the dead would be sent to China and gathered together with their forefathers; and peace would be made because honor had been satisfied.

I denied that such a scheme of things had to be. I told him he had followed his judgment once and slid through a trap door; and that Sat was not going to get out of my sight until I was well out into a lighted street. He said that unless I did as he said we would all be murdered sooner or later. Madame Guigane, though with no marked anxiety, said that it was so.

I was exasperated at the figure set, too. I said it was not worth forty thousand dollars to pay for all the Chinamen killed in a hundred years; and demanded to know where I would get a sum of the kind.

He whispered to me:

"The jewels, old man. A handful o' them."

For my part I wouldn't have paid a cent. I had never yet paid a cent to keep any man from wanting to kill me, and I did not like to begin with Chinamen. But Lord Bob, the women, Jackman— I made a compromise. When we were in a place that I thought secure, Lord Bob and Sat

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could wrangle to a decision regarding the jewels it took to be worth forty thousand dollars.

I have since learned that a Chinaman does respect the truce made by blood-money; and after all it is no doubt more satisfactory than the Saxon method of taking the murderer to law and getting him killed vicariously by a hangman—when the murderer does not employ a more able lawyer than the district attorney. But Saxons should know what best suits them. In a rude age they, too, used blood-money.

Sat somewhat protested against my provision, but was at last persuaded. But Lord Bob must have used the automatics as an argument, for the Chinaman, steady as he was, glanced down at them where they rested, ready in my hands.

"May we go to your place, Madame Guigane?" Lord Bob asked.

"You sure can," she said.

It was in looking at her as she gave her answer that I noticed that the broken arm had been lifted so that the hand rested inside of her waist, which she had torn open to make an improvised sling; and the other arm encircled Zoronna tenderly; and Zoronna, with head down, leaned against her.

Lord Bob shouted orders, no doubt with many curses in them. The mob of Chinamen before the doorway nearest to us edged back with a shuffling of padded, slippered and bare feet. He flung an arm out in an angry gesture and evidently commanded them to give way farther. The passage was cleared.

He went ahead, and after him the women slowly. Zoronna stumbled a time or two, then seemed to gather strength resolutely. Jackman went by the side of Sat, and I followed. As I passed from the room the wailing of San Toy broke out again.

In the way that Lord Bob went it was not far to the street, and the passages were well lighted; but there was a bewildering crookedness about the way. The Chinese must love complications, twists and turns, as they seem to love curious little boxes that fit, one inside of the other, indefinitely or nearly so. And some people think of that childish intricacy as great subtlety, marvelous ingenuity.

We came into a big, bare storeroom sort of place, and from there went through a heavy door into a dim street. It was drizzling, chilly, and the shadows were thick.

Almost at once a policeman and two men in plain clothes hurried up, demanding to know what had been going on around there. All that racket and shooting. Not a chink for three blocks around knew a thing. The officers were suspicious.

Lord Bob had the ready speech of a carefully rehearsed actor. Why, as a tribute to honored guests Sin Chang had given a Chinese play that had a big battle in it. Enormous fire-crackers were exploded. A great time!

And with a careless, chatting improvision he began to sketch the theme of the play and to tell various incidents. The women stood against the wall, shadowed. The officers mumbled something about it being "—— funny." Lord Bob whispered to them confidentially. He gave them his card—or at least *a* card. He then pressed something into the hand of the largest plain-clothes man and I caught the phrase of— "—not let reporters get on to the lady's name——"

It was his astonishing naturalness and ready brain that cleared the way. No man I ever knew could equal him for acting and quick wit.

WE WENT to Madame Guigane's and we four men filled a small, stuffy room, while Lord Bob and the imperturbable Chinaman haggled ceremoniously over a heap of gems that were put on to the silver tray of an opium "lay." I understood little or nothing of what was going on, or rather of how it was going on; but I continued to nudge Lord Bob to be through with the bargaining; and when it was concluded Sat pulled a piece of cloth from his pocket and slowly put the stones into it.

Then I gave him another stone, an emerald, as something extra and unasked for San Toy. He accepted it gravely. I had visions of the little widow being able to live in something like comfort for a time anyway; but when Sat was gone Lord Bob rudely said that I was a fool.

"He'll keep the stone an' sell San Toy. She's a slave girl. Why, he didn't have nerve enough to include a claim for her—an' he claimed ever'thing down to the cost of the powder used in shootin' at you. You may not think it, but we paid, too.

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Paid so well he'd be glad to have you call again. It's all part of the game—gettin' the worst of it after you win."

He added philosophically:

"That is, of the Chinese game. Jackman an' I went down that trap like it was paved with banana-peels—didn't we, Jack? I hurt my bad shoulder, an' some fool gagged me so I couldn't swear. Finally got our hands—an' mouths—loose an' waited. Knew it was you the first shot; an' when Sat came tumblin' through that trap I knew the Lord o' the white race had heard my prayer. They opened the door to let Sat out—I made 'im tell 'em to.

"Sin Chang's gone—nobody seemed to know where; which only means nobody'd say. You made the Sats curious, an' bein' as they like jewels, they entertained you—Sat pretendin' to be Sin. Takin' a chance you wouldn't know any better—you didn't. And now about Zoronna——"

ZORONNA sat amid the cushions of Madame Guigane's room, with both hands to her chin. Her eyes were very bright and feverish; her cheeks glowed.

I threw open a window and turned out the gas grate. I did not wish to run the risk of anybody fainting. It was oppressively close, but no one appeared to notice it but myself. When I opened the window Madame Guigane asked me to throw a cloak over her shoulder. I did so. She took my arm and pulled me down to hear the whispered—

"Don, do you know why I went there?"

I shook my head. It is never well to anticipate a woman's answer. Women do not like it. I knew she went there because the horror of a white girl becoming a Chinese "slave" was too much for even her embittered conscience.

"You don't know? Can't guess, Don?"

I assured her that I could not.

"Go over there an' sit down. Some day I may tell you."

I looked across the room. Zoronna had just whispered something to Lord Bob and was regarding him tensely. He shot a quick glance toward me, evaded my eyes and nodded. It was, I believe, a reluctant nod, a strained acquiescence; but he could deny her nothing.

I turned my back for the purpose of letting them finish whatever confidences they might have, and caught Madame Guigane staring up at me with an enigmatic fixity.

"Lord help me, but you're a stupid," she whispered noiselessly.

I supposed that she referred to something that had passed between Lord Bob and Zoronna, which I plainly had not detected.

Lord Bob called Jackman to him and whispered; then Jackman left the room. I was just a little irritated at that. I do not ask any one for his or her confidence. Sometimes I demand it. I thought I was in a way entitled to be included in any intimacy at that time; but if they preferred not—well, I would ask no questions.

Zoronna's story was quickly told, though she spoke slowly.

Hurgronje had sold her to Sin Chang—Sin Chang was at Hurgronje's now—for the Red Moon.

In trying to persuade her to be "sold" he had promised that he would speedily arrange for her escape from the Chinaman, but that he must and would have that ruby.

Whether she had fainted, been drugged, or what had happened, Zoronna could not say. The last she could remember was Hurgronje's mocking smile and ironically soft voice as she screamed in horror at the suggestion. She had come to consciousness surrounded by Chinese girls.

Whether he had intended all along to send her to Sin Chang as he did, presumably as an illustration of audacity and ingenuity as a smuggler, may be doubted. The doubt is unimportant. He did send her; and Hurgronje was trying to impress Sin Chang with certain ideas of his for wholesale smuggling.

Opium was bringing enormous prices, and all of it had to be smuggled in. Smoking-opium could be, I have heard, manufactured in this country, but the revenue tax on it was something like $300 per pound.

She knew of his proposed deal in opium. She had got into his private papers, and had thought that she had made him believe that the papers had been disturbed by his pet gorilla—which was harmless enough and meddlesome, and to Zoronna was a terrifying creature though almost human. But Hurgronje was not easily deceived. He had told her so in his soft, deep voice, smiling at the time.

Zoronna said to me that she was sure Hurgronje had known who Madame Kraschenin (Krascheninkoff) really was. She

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knew that he knew. He had no doubt used that knowledge to impress Madame Kraschenin with his own clairvoyance and "powers," and perhaps had in some one of his subtle ways attracted her because he knew of the gifts in jewels her husband had given her.

The sisters had not been friends because, Zoronna said, it was part of her original agreement with Hurgronje not to let any one know who she really was or to communicate with former acquaintances. He perhaps was afraid that they might influence her to get away from him.

There was a strange, tragic coldness about her, though she graciously enough thanked me, begged a thousand forgivenesses, and said all the things that a sensitive woman could be expected to say at such a time. But she was at once cold and tense, her eyes bright and tearless; she seemed to me to be a woman apart from these times and my race, and more like a barbarian princess who has finished with the feminine weaknesses of tears and wails, and is left with but the passion for revenge—or in her case vengeance.

From time to time she glanced at Lord Bob. There was some understanding between them. He was very sobered and resolute. I felt as anybody would have felt at being left out of their confidence.

It was only one o'clock. It seemed to me that it should be morning. Stirring situations seldom take up much of a clock's time.

I wondered what to do. By morning Hurgronje would know that I was alive, at hand; and I would be dodging assassins and be beset by people that kept, or tried to keep, in the shadows. But I rather thought enough had been done for one night—and yet, not wholly decided on what to do, I left them.

Madame Guigane followed me into the hall.

"Don," she said, "I don't like that woman."

Women's likes and dislikes are a source of undending annoyance to anybody that pays attention to them; but her remark was surprizing, for I had thought she was almost affectionatley attentive toward Zoronna. However, I did not want an argument and I had no prejudices, so I made an evasive reply.

"The boy loves her, an' she doesn't care that—" a savage little snap of thumb and finger—"for him."

"I can't help it."

"*You* don't love her?"

Of all the silly questions—I said that I did not.

"Why," she asked with a sort of repressed, triumphant air, "did you run such risks for her?"

I explained that I had not known there were going to be any such risks when I had started.

"Don?" She regarded me intently.

"Yes."

"If I ever find out you've lied to me I'll—I'll shoot somebody."

"Who? Me?" I asked, wholly puzzled but half-amused.

"No. Myself."

With that she turned and scooted off.

OTHER things got my attention almost at once, for as soon as I was out of the house Jackman came from the shadows.

"Mr. Richards," he said, using the name by which I had been first introduced, "may I speak with you?"

That always seems a silly thing to ask when a man is face to face with me.

"Lord Bob and Miss Symondi are going over there——"

He motioned vaguely into the drizzling night.

"Yes?"

That was information.

"They don't want you to know——"

A stumbling pause.

"Sent me down to get a taxi to go to the wharf. I've got it there."

Again a gesture. This time toward a street lamp that half-revealed a shadow identifiable as a taxicab.

"And you think I ought to go too—uninvited?"

"I was hoping you would think so. They are not going to even take me."

That was information. Very unwise of them, indeed, I reflected. Jackman was a good man. The previous night on the bay had shown that.

"What do you think they are up to, Jackman?"

"I haven't an idea, sir. Except that she said to him—

" 'Tomorrow will be too late.'

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"She said they had planned to have a big time tonight."

" 'They'?"

"Hurgronje and Sin Chang. He is entertaining the Chinaman."

"You are a very good friend to Lord Bob, Jackman?"

"I would be in prison but for him. It is a long story, sir. I——"

"Both of you'll probably land there. You think you and I should sort of be on hand to see that all goes well. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir. Something of that kind."

"You know the house? I would probably have some trouble in finding it. I could, of course, but——"

His answer interrupted me.

"I know it. Though I didn't know whose it was," he said.

He had been instructed to have a taxi waiting at the corner. The taxi was there. We left it, and hurried along until we finally located another—one of many that lurked about the tenderloin. And we drove rapidly to the wharf.

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS dark as the inside of a negro's fist, and we were standing waist-deep in a flower-bed looking up at the unlighted side of a large house. We were wet and chilled. The rain sifted down, flurried and shaken by a stiff wind that came in from the ocean like a hurrying, stealthy invader stealing upon the city in the night time.

Twenty yards away water was splashing on the shore-line, and waves tossed themselves not madly, but a little excitedly, on the rocks of the landing. It was a choice night for our sort of work. Under Jackman's pilotage we had approached Belvedere some distance away from the house he identified as Hurgronje's.

"It wasn't for anything like burglary that you are under obligations to Lord Bob, was it?"

"You mean—" he asked vaguely.

"Lord Bob kept you from prison, you said. Was it for burglary? . . . No? . . . Nothing; only if you pick the wrong house we'll both probably land there on that charge."

Jackman seemed surprized, and, judging by his tone, a little uneasy. I did not intend to go into the house, did I? I certainly did not intend to stay out in that cold and drizzle until my feet had sprouted in the flower-bed.

Jackman expressed the expectation that we would remain watchfully lurking as a kind of relief expedition for Lord Bob. But when he saw that my intentions were something different he objected to the hint that he could remain as a sort of rear guard and reserve. He never liked to be left behind, he said modestly. That was why he was already there ahead of Lord Bob. But what would we do if we could get into the house?

"Look around. Look around, and maybe ask a few questions or something. But you are sure this is the house?"

He was.

There should be a large and interesting basement, I told him, relying on the information of Zoronna. But I supposed that its doors were double-barred and windows were iron-grated.

Strange that not a flicker of light was at any window. But Hurgronje knew how to make an artful use of heavy black curtains. It was very late too: maybe all were asleep.

We went prowling.

Jackman, who had seen the house in daylight, said that it was two stories high with a tower room added to that; and on one side it reached right to the water—in which case the "basement" would be above the water-level, like a garage built under a house.

I would have given much for the use of a little light; but though I had a small flash-light I hesitated to run the risk of attracting anybody's eyes; so we fumbled and stumbled on. One thing I liked about Jackman was that he did not talk much, and if he did shiver a little it was nothing against his courage on a chill night like that. Besides, I have known the teeth of a lot of brave men to chatter on warm nights.

We edged around a corner of the house, and the wind caught us. It seemed sentiently trying to push us back, not furiously at all, but with a steady and unfriendly pressure. But it would have taken a gale to turn us back, for we had caught a faint glow of light sifting through a narrow window, barred by iron rods, about three feet above the ground.

We crept forward. The air seemed to have suddenly become warmer, but I suppose it was only the blood getting a little excited.

The bars were about four inches part and

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solidly embedded into the rock. The window was about three feet wide and two feet high, and opened from the top. It was opened a few inches and held in place by a rod, like a transom. Somebody had wanted a little fresh air. The glass was covered with heavy black cloth.

The floor of the basement was some three or four feet lower than the ground where we stood, or in other words the basement floor was just about on a level with high tide.

I had a fair, though limited view of the interior, and at first it looked something like a dynamo room. There was an engine built into a bed of cement slightly raised from the floor. Jackman said that it was a gasoline engine. There were some electrical contraptions about—levers, belts and such things. Within the room a man sat in a padded office chair, his back toward us.

I flipped a tiny pebble inside of the room. It rattled on the cement floor, but he did not stir. If we had had a fishing-pole and a silk rope we might have tried an interesting experiment in venturing to slip a noose over his head; but we had nothing of the kind.

I stooped down and looked long and hard through the nebulous light of the expansive basement, and a little thrill went through me like an invisible rapier as I detected a motionless form, almost shadow-hidden, and seeming to be staring right at the window. That was disquieting for a moment—for something longer than a moment—because it was not easy to be sure that the figure was another of Hurgronje's statues. It was, though.

With our ears to the bars and open window we listened, but not a sound could be heard. Strange. Perhaps every one was abed, and this fellow was a watchman keeping vigil after a fashion memorable among watchmen.

So far as I could see there was only one way to get in, and when there is one way only to do a thing the trouble of a decision is avoided. I removed the flashlight, tried it against the inside of my coat, took out a gun and told Jackman to try his marksmanship with pebbles. He threw three or four, and one of them struck the man on the shoulder; but he did not awaken.

"Try a handful of sand," I suggested.

He did. The man stirred, sat up, in a sort of a daze.

"This way!" I called to him softly.

He whirled about in the chair. He was some fifteen feet away, and he looked up into a large automatic on which played the stream of light from the electric torch. I used the flashlight so that he would have no trouble in identifying the gun as a gun.

"Hands up—then don't move," I cautioned him.

His hands went up.

It was a curious form of hold-up, but perfectly effective.

HE WAS an ordinary-looking fellow, around middle-age, with a heavy mustache of which he must have been a little vain. His eye-sockets seemed as large as dollars.

"Step closer—and come carefully," I warned him.

He shook nervously as he obeyed.

I asked where the entrance to the basement was, and he pointed in the opposite direction from where I stood. I cautioned him against making gestures, and suggested that it was better to talk. He said that the entrance was around by the landing.

I told him to hand up the key. He denied having the key. I thought he was lying, but he had us at a disadvantage.

I told Jackman to see what he could do with the bars while I kept the gentleman attentive to the gun which I had presented toward him. Jackman was a strong fellow. He wrenched and bent the bars, but with his hands could not force them from their sockets in the concrete.

"If I had something to pry with—" said Jackman.

"Drop this window—clear down," I told the man.

And I warned him against making sudden moves or attempting anything heroic such as suddenly closing the window in our faces. He dropped it about half-way and said that it would go no farther. I told him to put his weight on to it and break it down.

He made a half-hearted attempt, but upon being urged a little swung his full weight to the hinges, and they gave way. The window sagged down.

"That pipe-wrench over there—" said Jackman. "If I had that——"

I did not know what a pipe-wrench was, and I did not locate it by Jackman's gesture. But the man seemed to understand. I told him to keep his face to me, to move across the floor backward to that wrench, to pick it up and bring it to the window. I must

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have succeeded in making him believe that any moment he turned his face he would be a dead man, for he backed about thirty or more feet—Jackman assured me that he was going in the right direction—and brought the wrench quite docilely. Jackman used it in getting leverage against the bars and very quickly pulled an end of two of them lose from the stone.

Jackman went into the basement first, and held his wrench over the man's head while I came through the window.

"Who-oo the —— are you?"

Curiosity was getting a little the better of his trembling while Jackman was searching him for keys.

I assured him that it was a good guess. Then on second thought decided that it was about as well that he should know who I was; really, I suppose, because I have a touch of what is called vanity; but also because I did not want any misunderstanding among Hurgronje's crowd as to who had been among them. I was through with secrecy and its uses.

He gasped and gaped and seemed to have an attack of the palsy. But it was not fear of me so much perhaps as the shock of finding the supposedly dead before him. That is always disturbing to some people's nervous system.

"I knew," he said with shaking tone, "this deviltry 'd bring bad luck."

So he was also a little superstitious. Encouragingly I inquired into the "deviltry." The reply was illuminating. He pointed to the rigid figure I had already noticed.

That had been used a few hours before to impersonate me. Hurgronje had frightened two negroes half-crazy. It went right up through what appeared to be a solid floor, and through a speaking-tube attached to its pedestal Hurgronje had made it appear to have a voice.

Keys were found on him, but none of them was the basement key, for the very good reason that when Jackman went across to try them he found the key in the lock. He turned the lock back, thinking we might want to leave that way in something of a hurry.

What the man said about the statue was interesting. We all walked over and looked at it. I took precautions to discourage the chance of sudden movements on the part of the man. He liked to talk. His mouth was rather wide and loose, veiled somewhat by the large mustache; a garrulous mouth.

The statue was about my height, rather slender, dressed in black. The arms were folded in an attitude that may have suggested bold poise to the inflamed imagination of certain spectators; and an effort was made to have a realistic ghastliness such as is commonly attributed to "ghosts"—an effect obtained by what appeared to me to be an application of flour over a greased surface. No doubt the same statue had impersonated many a dead man.

I was shown the little platform on which the statue was placed for the ascension, and had my attention called to the little groove about the base wherein powder was sifted in a thin circle clear about the pedestal; and after the statue had emerged silently through the floor into the utterly dark room, the powder was ignited by an electric spark —and lo, from the burst of flame the poor ghost that needs must answer Hurgronje's incantation stood revealed. No doubt it was very impressive from the spectators' point of view.

"The negroes—what did they do?"

"Went crazy, I heard. Can't hear nothin' down here. But one o' the fellers told me. He was laughin'. I don't laugh at things like that."

"Certainly not. The negroes were frightened then?"

"They thought it was you, an' they knowed they'd killed— I mean they— You know—" he ended weakly.

I inquired as to what was going on up there now. He said that he guessed everybody must be drunk as nobody had bothered him for over two hours. There was a speaking-tube and a system of signals by bells through which he received messages. Two rings of that bell—he motioned—meant, for instance, to push out the wall. Thereupon a wall would "magically" disappear and various supernatural things would be revealed.

"And three rings?" I asked.

That was to release the stairway so that whoever was on it would slide to the bottom. The stairs became without steps. A kind of Coney Island stunt, it seemed; but with a little encouragement my informant said that it was a precaution to keep any one from possibly going up the stairs on to the floor above.

"And one ring—what does that signify?"

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That was instantly to put out all the lights in the house. It was often done preparatory to some demonstration of the "supernatural."

"And four rings?" I asked, jumping back to the sequence.

That was to strike at once, electrically, various musical gongs arranged all over the house.

It was a very intricate and well thought-out system. There was a large switch-board that gave control in various ways; to move this and that, cause some enormously heavy piece of furniture to rise in the air, and another to glide.

Certain parts of the floor were movable, like a tread-mill, so that any one standing on that particular strip could—apparently—be brought through a solid wall, and glide, without taking a step, across the room, to disappear through another wall.

The basement, he explained further—for once well into talking and given encouragement he went on with remarkably little hesitancy—was practically sound proof. The big gasoline engine was mostly used to generate electricity. They took as much voltage from the city wires as they dared to use without exciting suspicion in the electric company.

Everything was well thought out. Hurgronje, he said, took "pride"—his word—in making everything work perfectly.

I kept my eyes on our guide and let Jackman's eyes follow his gestures; and one of us remained on each side of him. Mine is a cautious and watchful nature, and I was just the least little bit suspicious of this fellow's agreeability. But perhaps there was cause to be. Being urged at those points where any reluctancy appeared, his tongue trotted along nimbly enough.

I do not know how much he may have concealed, but what he said was all interesting. For instance, the little buttons by which Hurgronje signaled to the basement were ingeniously concealed in many convenient places—in the arm of his favorite chair, under the edge of a table, in the wall, so that he could be in any of many places and still control his "magic."

SURPRIZING things always happen quickly. Upon reflection I see that it is not a very wise remark to make—though it is true. And it was surprizing to see four men, themselves coming as if summoned by magic, stamp through the darkened door of the basement. Their voices were loud and seemed to be pleased. It had not been long since they had had much too drink, and they were satisfied with some deviltry just completed. Their caps and coats glistened with rain.

I crouched low, pulling the man down and signaling to Jackman to watch him. The men were well satisfied with something they had done.

"Nobody," one of them said, "would ever find that —— ——"

The profane word used was very vague. Another called, "Hey, Charley," and it was evident that they had come on some matter with the fellow in charge of the basement.

Lest they might separate and be in three or four different places I did not think it well to wait.

"Hands up!" I said, and a gun was in each of my hands.

It was their turn to reflect that surprizes come quickly. An oath or two of astonishment was blurted out. Some of them were frozen in awkward attitudes, and, hesitating for a moment, half-lifted their arms. One fellow, more drunk or daring—often, as in this case, the same as foolhardy—tugged at his hip pocket.

I disliked to risk it, but the man who will permit himself to be trifled with when he has leveled guns is lost. The roar of the gun crashed like a blast of near thunder through the basement, and the man's hand fell away from his pocket as he was knocked staggeringly back—his arm shattered at the elbow. Cruel, perhaps; but they were boasting of having just drowned somebody in the bay, of having sunk a boat too, and so concealed all evidence.

There was a stir behind me, a glancing blow. I sprang to one side, but did not dare look. Another blow; then, "I got 'im," from Jackman. It proved that Jackman had "got" him, too; for the man paid with a deep unconsciousness for his recklessness in making a sudden swipe at me with a piece of something picked from the floor. Jackman had hit him with the wrench.

No time was to be lost. The basement, I feared, would not be enough sound-proof to conceal the roar of one of my guns. As rapidly as possible the men, one after the other, were tied hand and foot with pieces of insulated copper wire, a roll of which had

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previously been observed by the capable Jackman.

Before we had finished there was a whizzing and whistling at our back. Some one was signaling down the speaking-tube.

"Tie them up—tightly," I said. "Then answer it."

The men were inclined to swear, but I encouraged them to be silent.

Jackman stepped to the speaking-tube. It is hard to identify anybody's voice through one of the things.

"The matter?" he asked, and looked at me inquiringly. "Why—why——"

"Get excited—say an explosion," I whispered.

"Why, there's plenty the matter."

His voice rose. "The gas-engine —— near blew up. . . . Heard it? . . . I should think you would have heard it—knocked me about forty feet. Huh?"

And with hand to mouthpiece toward me, something very like consternation on his heavy, solid face, and said—

"He's coming right down."

I looked about, but I could not distinguish a stairway. I had in a rather subsconscious way noted before that there was none in sight. I went quickly to one of the bound men, and asked where the stairway was.

"Find it yourself," he told me with a show of spirit.

Jackman was behind me. He said rapidly, "If I brain this fellow maybe the next 'un 'll talk," and his wrench was lifted.

One of the few scruples that I observe, or always have tried to observe, is not to threaten or abuse a helpless person. There is no reason for it except that I do not like to do it; but the second man did not wait to see his companion suffer. Jackman's earnestness impressed him.

"That door over there—to the left o' you," he said.

I turned back toward the door which I had already noticed, and which I had thought opened into a storeroom. I had scarcely reached it before it opened, and a man rushed out. The door automatically closed.

"Not a word," I told him.

He lifted his hands.

I was just a little disappointed for he was not Hurgronje. He was a rather intelligent-appearing fellow, in evening dress, rather of a society cast of feature and manner though perhaps his manner did not appear at the best advantage just then.

"Who are you?" he demanded with commendable coolness.

I told him.

He started back slightly as if from an impalpable blow. His expression changed. He was plainly distressed, a little frightened. His eyes took in the numerous captives that were distributed over the basement floor, and two or three wordless sounds escaped him.

"You came with her?" he asked.

The question no doubt was involuntary. It perhaps formed in his mind and was communicated without intention to his tongue.

I did not know precisely what he meant, but I had a pretty good idea, sufficiently good for me to venture the vague reply of:

"It would seem so, wouldn't it? And you—I believe we have met before, haven't we?"

Indeed we had not, if his word was to be believed. He correctly took it for granted that I hinted at the former visit I paid Hurgronje, the visit paid to him in New York. No. He was Hurgronje's secretary—just a secretary—nothing but a secretary. He had not been in the house "*that* night." Really he hadn't.

Question-marks are rather symbolically something like hooks, fishing-hooks. Quite directly, and with the appearance that it would not be well for him to be evasive, I asked some rapid questions and learned that Zoronna and Lord Bob had been caught. The landing had been guarded; they came to it, and were seized as soon as they got out. The man who had brought them—he had been taken care of too by those fellows there on the cold cement floor.

"So he wouldn't tell anybody what strange doings he had seen?" I asked.

I had guessed accurately. A little thing like cold-blooded murder did not seem to trouble these people any more than throwing a sawdust doll into a fireplace.

I demanded to know what had been done with Zoronna and Lord Bob, reminding this secretarial gentleman that I was soon likely to find out how near the truth his information was. He said that they were in the room above and that Hurgronje was talking with them. From his words I might have imagined that they were enjoying a cup of tea and social gossip—

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but I did not imagine any such thing.

Yes, the Chinaman was there too. Mr. Secretary was quite cautious, or he really did not know what was going on.

I tried the door through which he had come. I thought I would take a look up the stairs, perhaps go up and listen a little. But the door was locked.

He denied that anybody had come down with him. No. The door locked automatically, he said. I told him to unlock it. He could not he said.

I suggested that he had better do so anyway. No. The door was kept locked because fellows from the basement had a way of sneaking up to look at the "ceremonies," and once or twice had nearly spoiled things. I thought that plausible enough. but not convincing.

I asked how he intended to get back up. He said that the door was released by a button from up-stairs. One called on the tube, and then the door was opened. I felt inclined to say, "You are a liar;" but one should not say things like that to a prisoner. I asked if he was really sure that he was not mistaken. He said that he was sure.

Thereupon Jackman and I added him to our collection and desposited him on the basement floor. He was not disagreeable about it, but seemed rather uneasy over getting his clothes wrinkled and greasy. Some men are like that; think far more of their clothes than of their bodies.

THEN Jackman and I did a rather foolish thing. Foolishness should be calculated by the manner in which a thing is done, not, as it usually is, by the result.

The only noiseless way I could think of to get up-stairs was to use the contraption that raised the dead. Jackman said that he knew how to work it. He did. He experimented a bit, and raised and lowered the pedestal a few feet by handling some of the switches or levers, or something or other. He undoubtedly had a sort of genius for mechanics.

I stepped on that pedestal and told him to go slowly. I did not want to be rushed into the "world" above, and I did not care to bump my head against the ceiling in case an opening was not automatically made to admit me.

It occurred to Jackman that the lights in the basement should be put out so that their glow would not show through the hole; and since it seemed well to use all precautions that would help secrecy I told him to put them out. But rather than experiment with the numerous switches that had not been explained by the man Charley in order to find just which one controlled the basement lights, he unscrewed two or three, enough to disconnect them, and the basement was a gloomy place with only one distant light burning.

I got on the pedestal again, and repeated my warning about speed. The upward movement was almost imperceptibly slow; not the faintest jar. Slowly I moved upward, and, raising a hand directly above my head, felt about and was satisfied to find that the ceiling had "magically" opened to admit me; and at the same time I heard voices, not very clearly, but clearly enough to recognize the voice of Hurgronje, who was speaking deeply, impressively, and had the warm, leisurely tone of a man quite content with himself and the world.

As my head came above the floor I could see distinctly into the next room—though not so very distinctly either, since Hurgronje seemed to have an aversion to bright lights. A blue globe burned in the ceiling, casting a cold, vague light that did not seem to reach to the walls of the very large room.

I tell all this as if I had paused and studied the arrangement and situation; but, being somewhat observant by nature, I saw it in a little more than glance.

Hurgronje sat in a chair, a large comfortable chair, his back half-turned to a big table. The light was directly on him. Across the table I made out a rather large form and by his dress identified him as Sin Chang, an extraordinarily fat fellow. Hurgronje was himself a large man, with a rather massive head. He was looking at and speaking to some one about ten feet away, who sat in a chair with the back somewhat toward me. It was Zoronna. In the outer edge of the light I thought I saw two or three motionless persons—servants no doubt.

I was coming up in what must have been a deep and black alcove sort of room; and I thought that I would stand there quietly for a time and listen. But what one plans and what one does are sometimes rather different. I felt the pedestal stop; it seemed to settle into place with a faint and noiseless

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kind of jar—then who was the most astonished it would be difficult to say, for I suddenly seemed enveloped in flames, and very nearly fell over. There had been powder about the thing, and it was automatically ignited when the pedestal stopped. No doubt it was very weird, though at the time it did not impress me as so. The flames burned without noticeable heat for about three or four seconds, and though they did not reach above my waist they were too close. But they illuminated my face for a moment before I sprang almost frantically out of that fiery circle, which died away in a few seconds.

I heard a voice cry—

"Don!"

That was Lord Bob. I heard a woman scream, and caught a flash of a vanishing form.

Hurgronje sprang to his feet, incredulity and astonishment all over his face. He cried out—

"What on earth?"

And at once he answered his own question by pronouncing my name. Then the blue-domed light went out. He must have had a switch control of it at hand.

The rooms were black, not a glimmer of light anywhere. I had thought that I would shoot Hurgronje on sight.

I had never shot any man on sight, and it is hard to do the things one is not used to doing. The nearest I ever came to it was on the previous visit into Hurgronje's rooms; and then I was in a state very close to what is sometimes described as a "cold rage," for oddly enough I do grow almost cold when angry. I wished then that I had shot him on sight, but the unexpected flames leaping up from about my feet, the sudden extinguishing of the light, had been something of a disadvantage.

In the darkness there was motion, screams and cries; some curses, too. These came from Lord Bob. It sounded as if Zoronna knew that she was being murdered. She had leaped, perhaps to hide. And it sounded as if she was very rapidly being carried off to some place. Her cries came from up-stairs and were farther and farther off.

Hurgronje called various names. No doubt he was summoning some of his assassins. The basement being sound-proof, it is doubtful if those whom he wanted most urgently heard him. Then the sound of his voice ceased.

It is true that I had a flashlight, a small one. It is also true that I was not the sort of man who would hold up a flaming beacon to invite from complete darkness the guns of possible marksmen. Who cares to distinguish that caution by an offensive name is at liberty to do so.

Nor do I act hastily. I have found it not unwise to take plenty of time even when in a hurry, particularly when the situation is somewhat to the advantage of other people.

I took a few quiet steps to one side of the room, reached out as far as I could with my left hand, snapped on the flashlight as I placed it on the floor and jerked my hand back. A gun cracked deafeningly, and a bullet struck near the light—just what I had rather feared would happen. But I was watchful and ready, so that twice I fired toward that spurt of flame, and there was even amid the reverberent crashing of the gun's noise the thud of a falling body.

Among the targets I have practised with have been phosphorus-covered little blocks tossed up in the dark. Sometimes I have hit them, too.

I shot rapidly, then moved quickly and quietly to one side. The flashlight's beam streaked across the floor, giving a dim illumination many feet in front of it. I was behind it and obscured; also motionless and watchful.

"Don?" Lord Bob called. "Don!"

A note of anxiety came into his voice.

"Don!"

Then:

"Don, are you hurt? They're killin' her. I'm tied up. Don!"

And except for his voice there was no sound. Zoronna was no longer heard. Getting no answer from me, he swore anguishedly.

SOME one moved, and I stood poised in the direction of that sound. Silence then. I took from my pocket a pen-knife and dropped it to one side of me. But it did not draw fire.

It did draw Lord Bob's voice. He called me, asked if I was hurt, cursed Hurgronje, called upon me to come and cut him loose, shouted that Zoronna had been murdered.

A rough voice impatiently ordered him to "shut up." He had got on my nerves too, but I had had more patience than that person who was also waiting, waiting, waiting. I could not risk shooting in the

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direction of a voice. I must continue waiting, too. One of the most difficult things in the world is to be silent and motionless.

Lord Bob did not "shut up." He cursed savagely. There was the sound of footfall, then of a blow. He was being struck. I could not see him, but I judged that he must be between the flashlight and the other person. But the blow did not make Lord Bob silent. Far from it.

I waited. It was almost as hard as keeping silent on a rack, but I let the slow minutes go one after another and made not the faintest sound. The unexpectedness of my appearance through the floor, and the rapidity with which I had vanished from amid the powder flare had for the moment disconcerted Hurgronje's very efficient gunmen.

Presently the rough voices swore half-contemptuously, using the phrase, "That fellow's beat it—" and he stamped his feet, tempting me to shoot if I still remained there. I knew that with a little more temptation of the kind I would be likely to yield.

I was close to the wall, and by me was some kind of a stand. A very small one. It would offer scant concealment and no protection. But I was not really looking for that. I knew there could not be many left in Hurgronje's house who would make trouble—unless they got their hands and feet loose.

The rough voice said, "Oh, ——!" and almost at once a shaded electric light went on. It was some distance away from Lord Bob and to the right of him. The man had evidently reached out and jerked on the light, then crouched behind a chair, or maybe behind a curtain. The light was shaded, so that I could not see only very vaguely any distance behind it. But between me and the light I could see Lord Bob; and, more remarkable to relate, I could dimly see a large body sitting still in the chair beside the table. Sin Chang had not moved.

I crouched low, so low that one hand and knee were on the floor, and looked straight into the pool of light. I was sure, I knew, that the eyes of the watcher, growing accustomed to the light, would sooner or later in scanning the shadows be attracted to the dim outline that I made—and it was a matter of seeing the muzzle of his gun before he pulled the trigger. I knew that his eyes were straining at every object within range, distinguishing the familiar settings, slowly passing from one thing to another.

The strain was exhaustive. I had to put an end to it. I reached out and overturned the small stand, and as it fell clattering he fired, and fired more at the stand than at me. He shot from behind the back of a chair—and it was all over.

He was resourceful and he had courage, though he was a scoundrel. But the back of a chair offers no protection from steel-nosed bullets.

I knew then that there were no more scoundrels on watch; for, having shot, I jumped evasively to one side, and being more intent on the back of the chair than anything else, my foot struck the flashlight and spun it around, and it settled with the cold white beam fully revealing me. I was out of it almost at once, but certainly I would have drawn the fire of even the slowest sort of man.

However, it was more with the feeling that the risk had to be taken than with any air of confidence that I moved across the room—Lord Bob talking wildly with mingled despair and elation—loosened his bindings and looked about for other lights that could be turned on at their sockets.

Neither of the two dead men was Hurgronje.

WE FOUND other lights in various parts of the room—shaded lights; and I tore the shades off. Lord Bob begged me for a gun. I pointed to one that lay on the floor where it had fallen from the hand of the fellow who had with poor discretion taken a position on the stairs.

Lord Bob, mad with anxiety for Zoronna, furious at the treatment, was—at last—murderous. But I jerked him back from the stairs up which he had started to rush.

All this while he had talked. It was a kind of incoherent jumbling of damnation of Hurgronje, prayer for Zoronna, and some gratitude toward Sin Chang.

He was, to put it coarsely, a big fat Chinaman, not at all prepossessing. His face was mask-like; his hands rested on his stomach; except for the light and movement of his eyes he might easily have been mistaken for an idol or something of the kind.

I did not know what to say to him. If he had been excited, had squealed and jabbered, showed any trace of any kind of

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emotion, some remarks would have suggested themselves.

Hurgronje, who through Cantello had suspected Lord Bob of being the same fellow who had made trouble years before—though Zoronna had denied it, doing all that she could to protect him—no sooner clapped eyes on him than he was for then and there having Lord Bob's throat cut. Sin Chang had merely said and repeated:

"Lold Bob is my man. I keep 'im. Not you."

As for Zoronna: Sin Chang had, so to speak, washed his hands of her. Though by his code and bargain he could consider her as his property he had shown no concern. Lord Bob had begged him to stand out for her, even reminded him that Zoronna was his slave; but Sin Chang had only raised a fat hand slightly and faintly moved his head, murmuring—

"Women make too much tlouble."

There he had sat like a lump of dough or like a superior being—depending on the mood and viewpoint one takes. After all he was too heavy of weight to be very successful at running, and perhaps too truly fatalistic to be frightened. Moreover, the man who had built up such a control and business as his had to have some kind of remarkable qualities.

"Sin Chang," I said rather fatuously, "you are in bad company."

He faintly nodded, and the merest suggestion of a smile touched his long mouth. Then he spoke. His voice was soft, pleasing, almost velvety:

"They say you the devil. I b'lieve 'um. You been my place. Laise ——. Come lere. Laise moi ——."

He slowly lifted his two hands, fingers upward—bending the arms from the elbows—in a kind of sluggish gesture that seemed to indicate the wish to call the game quits, at an end.

Lord Bob threw out the questions that I had in my head. His tongue was more nimble than mine.

"How on earth did you know? And you didn't tell Hurgronje?"

"Tel'phone," said Sin Chang laconically, and added something in Chinese which Lord Bob said was untranslatable but meant that when a man has taken a woman into his house he must expect a hundred devils to gnaw on his toes.

An odd thing, I thought, for a man to say when he had a houseful of women. But to every man, yellow perhaps as well as white, there are women and then there is one woman who is different and gives him wisdom, not always pleasant. I do not know what Sin Chang really meant.

Lord Bob explained:

"He got the news over the phone, Don, an' never peeped. Sin Chang's a good sort, I tell you. Always found him just that. He'd not made any trouble at all if he'd been over there. He's got sense—knows when he's made a mistake. Hurgronje swore she was a Chinese girl—she is, partly."

It seemed that he did have "sense." Madame Guigane had had much the same opinion.

"But the Red Moon; did he lose it?" I asked.

For answer Sin Chang plucked at his robe and held out a large red stone. He smiled slightly, and watched me attentively. I only glanced at it.

I learned later from Lord Bob, who knew gems, that it had not been a genuine ruby. Sin Chang had probably thought I might seize it.

He had not given up the real stone to Hurgronje either. He had explained that it could not be given up until Buddha, from whose forehead it originally came, had been propitiated with prayers and offerings. Perhaps, I say perhaps, the fear of Buddha had not occurred to him until he had heard that Zoronna was gone. More likely he had never intended to give up the ruby.

The early part of night had been spent at dnner, and in the entertaining spectacle of frightening the two negroes.

Two Chinese attendants, who had made themselves inconspicuous, appeared timidly out of the shadows. Sin Chang sat immobilely, almost drowsily, in his big chair.

Lord Bob and I had no more time to pause—and it had taken less time than it may seem. We searched about, and when we came back to ascend the stairs Sin Chang and his attendants were bundled in cloaks and going to the door.

"Lood night," said Sin Chang pleasantly, politely; and Lord Bob said good night.

Then the three Chinamen slowly went out into the night—night still, though nearly dawn. No matter what Sin Chang may have really thought and felt, he had the

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judgment to get away without doing anything that disclosed unfriendly feeling.

WE WENT up the stairs. I would have gone watchfully, with something of stealth perhaps.

There was no using any such precautions with Lord Bob unleashed. He went boundingly; and when I got up, following the path of his flashlight—or mine rather, for he had picked it up—I found him beating on a door and ragefully demanding that it be opened so he could kill whoever was inside. He had heard voices in there; and they could be heard still—rather inarticulate prayers and moans.

I told Lord Bob he was a fool. But he was beating at the panels with his heel. A fool indeed. He beat a hole in the panel. He thrust in the flashlight and put his face to the hole, too.

Two big negroes were crouching in terror on the floor. Their faces, hideous faces, seemed nearly white. They were begging for mercy, and they seemed to think they were begging of demons that had broken from a graveyard.

There might have been comedy in the situation except for the terrible earnestness of Lord Bob. His curses were even a little chilling to me. He demanded where Hurgronje was; but the answers were inarticulate.

There was a bit of irony, indeed. Hurgronje had so frightened two of his most evil and deadly men that in the hour of his need they were reduced to gibbering idiots.

"I heard Hurgronje's voice. He was swearin' at 'em," said Lord Bob. "Break in this door, Don!"

I kicked at the panel myself, widened the hole, poked a gun inside and told Lord Bob to thrust in his hand, reach over and turn the key. It was quite simple. He did so.

The door opened. The negroes groveled on the floor, their faces hidden. It was sickening, but I struck up Lord Bob's gun. I believe that he would have shot both of them then and there. And he was the man who would not shoot even in self-defense to keep from arrest. When one of these quiet and "safe" men run amuck with a gun they fill everything full of holes.

We searched the room, and found an unlocked door leading through from a closet. Perhaps Hurgronje had gone that way. Lord Bob stood guard, and I bound those negroes as hard and tightly as I could. Almost smotheringly I gagged them.

I could without an uneasy conscience have poked them, so bound and gagged, out of the window straight down into the bay—but I didn't. One of my weaknesses is not to give even helpless men what they deserve.

There was no using discretion with Lord Bob loose. He dashed about heedlessly from room to room, thrust his head behind doors, jerked back curtains, turned on whatever lights he found, and could easily have been killed a thousand times. His voice was never silent. He was cursing terribly.

We came into what was evidently Hurgronje's room. There was a bed, a desk covered with papers, walls lined with books, some kind of a very large statue of bronze—some kind of an Egyptian god, I suppose; he seemed to have delight in that sort of thing.

We hastily poked into every place that could conceal a man. I, suspicious of his idols and statues, thought maybe this one was hollow too, and pushed against it to overturn it; but it seemed so solid that I could not shake it; and, looking down, I saw that it was indeed riveted to the floor.

The room's windows opened right above the bay. A penny dropped from a window-ledge would have fallen on the wet rocks, tide-covered.

There were many strange and curious things in the room, but we had no time to examine them. Lord Bob was out of the room and darting through the hall just as soon as he was sure Hurgronje was not to be found. I went after him.

Lord Bob opened a door. It disclosed a narrow stairway. He was half-way up that stairway in one jump, the flashlight gleaming before him. I dislike to hurry, but I followed as close as I could, which was some four or five yards behind.

Looking up, I saw the flashlight strike a door, I saw Lord Bob open it—I heard a choked cry, the light went out, there was bump of his body, a sort of loud murderous snarl, and I fired into the darkness ahead, lifting the bullet so as not to hit Lord Bob, who I knew had gone down. In another two seconds I was up into that room, firing as I went—firing blindly it is true. I could see nothing, but I heard something and shot toward it. There was the fall of glass, and in the gun-glare I saw a window.

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I felt my way along the wall to an open window. It was dark outside, but with a slightly gray tinge in the sky of dawn breaking through a cloudy heaven. It was still drizzling.

The window opened on to the roof. I was in the tower-room. I heard breathing—or thought I did. Somebody was on the roof, just around the edge of the corner.

I was beginning to be able to make out the vague outlines of the roof, the corner of the tower-room. If I could just poke an arm around that corner and shoot!

I had a gun in either hand as I stepped out. The roof was slippery as greased glass, but I hooked an elbow about midway of the window's side and leaned forward, thrusting the gun around the corner. But I did not shoot.

I could not imagine what had happened, though I had no time to do any imagining. A hand with incredible swiftness and strength tore the gun from my fingers, and in the same instant literally jerked and hurled me from my feet.

I FELL on the roof, scrambling blindly. Instinct—nothing else—inbred by so long feeling that a gun is about the same as a hand, caused me to cling still to the gun in my left hand.

I dug into the wet shingles with my nails and beat with my heels, summoning every nerve and muscle to grip that wet roof. I caught my breath; for slowly, slowly, irresistibly as if being drawn, I slipped down from shingle to shingle.

I savagely thrust the sight of the gun down to make that much more resistance. If the shingles had been dry even that slight help might have been of definite assistance—but not on wet shingles.

I threw myself over on my face, spread out arms and legs, desperately clinging. That checked the slipping, or rather made it more slow—but I went on and on down that roof.

It takes a long time to write of what happened in twenty seconds. One of the few things I know of that is as bad as it is imagined to be is that of sliding down a roof. My finger-nails broke, but would not hold, and I felt my feet hanging in air and knew that in another second I would drop if I could not get hold; so, driving the sight of the gun-barrel hard into a shingle, with the other hand I reached down to my waist and gripped the edge of the roof, at the same time leaning forward against the roof as tightly as I could.

And there I was, poised delicately as a sword-blade balanced point down on a hair, not daring to move, scarcely daring to breathe—with the tide-washed rocks below me. Something was cutting into my groin two or three inches below the edge of the eaves. I felt the sharpness of it, but my thoughts and eyes were riveted on a shape that crouched easily on the peak of the roof, dimly outlined against the dark sky.

I felt that my brain had gone glimmering. So intent was I on believing that Hurgronje was on the roof that my brain would not accept what my eyes saw, and I tried to make his outline from that shapeless, grotesque thing.

For a second I understood as never before what people feel who believe in magic, for it seemed that Hurgronje had changed himself into a gorilla. The thing glared down with fiery eyes at me.

Time has no meaning in situations of the kind. It was probably about ten seconds that it sat motionless while I strained with the last resources of desperation to hang on; then with a quickness, a sureness of motion that appalled me, that thing began climbing over the peak of the roof and started to descend along the edge of one of the gabled eaves. Down it came, gripping with its four "hands" until it was on a line with me and some thirty feet away; and then it began to move toward me, walking with hands on a level with its feet, and leaning slightly toward the slope of the roof.

It was coming to knock me off. A bursting bubble from a child's soapy pipe would have done as much.

I twisted a little, and I slipped, slid and was falling; but my clawing hand fastened on something—the gutter. The gun slipped from my left hand into the gutter as I grabbed hold with both hands. The gutter seemed to spring loose. It gave only slightly, but that slight flexibility was to me as if it were giving way. Too, some of the weight of that gorilla was on it, and coming closer. The sky was becoming more gray. The drizzle continued.

I am a fairly strong man, rather light of weight—that is, not fat—and with well-cared-for muscles. Danger is a marvelous stimulant too.

The gun had slipped into the gutter. I

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fumbled for it with the ends of my fingers, took a firm hold on the gutter's edge with my right hand, swung loose with my left and shot—again—again—again—and still another bullet went into that thing as after scrambling unsteadily it toppled and with a most nerve-shaking, angry, frantic howl went down.

I slipped the gun into my pocket and grasped the gutter again with both hands. I was tired, but not weak.

I turned my head right and left. It was at least thirty feet to the end of the roof where there might be a gutter drain down which I could possibly climb. It was sheer waste of time to hang there. The sharp edge of the gutter had cut my fingers so deeply that I felt some resistance in loosening them to swing along toward the drain. But I felt no pain. My fingers were cramped stiff, and bleeding, but there was no pain.

THEN below me I heard a laugh. There was no merriment in it, only forced, sardonic mockery. I bent my head but I could not see.

I knew the voice. It was a wonderful, expressive voice.

I knew who was looking up at me. Perhaps he had been looking up at me for some time, or maybe had been attracted by the shots and was waiting for me to drop.

I could not, as I have said, see him. But I could imagine.

He laughed again and again. No words—just the forced laughter; and he was fully aware of what torture that meant. He knew how to use his voice.

He was surely armed. He was not one to fight, but he would quickly enough shoot if he saw there was a chance of my reaching the drain. And if I drew a gun he could drop me at once.

I had one chance, one faint one. And but little time. The strain was almost unbearable; but of course in a crisis like that anything is bearable as long as the strength, which seems to loosen unimagined reservoirs of energy and stamina, lasted.

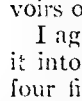
I again let go with my left hand and put it into my pocket, swinging loose with only four fingers, cut to the bone, between me and the rocks below. I looked down. There was Hurgronje, leaning from the window, perfectly distinguishable in the faint morning light. A hand was on the window-ledge, and in the other hand he held, but not threateningly, a large revolver.

He leaned far out and laughed quietly, but said not a word. Slowly, carefully, I drew the gun to the edge of my pocket until I felt the muzzle clear. I paused, as I seldom do, to reassure my aim; then pulled the trigger—a sharp click, and nothing more. The gun was empty.

Nothing could have been more hopeless. I shall not say that I lost hope. I shall not admit that I had any. In situations of the kind, hope is instinctive. I merely hung there like a damned soul to a wisp of cloud, and whatever sensation I experienced in those two or three seconds was one of utter astonishment and almost unbelief that for the first time in my life I had failed when my life was in the balance. Then even as I stared down into Hurgronje's triumphant face I saw his expression change to surprize, to horror; and, clawing frantically—the gun dropped from his hand—he reached out as if in sudden madness he was grasping at air, and fell headlong, a knife buried hilt-deep in his back. Through the window Zoronna's head appeared, looking down. Then, to see at what Hurgronje had been staring, she glanced up—and screamed.

I swung my left hand again to the gutter, and struggled—my right arm was almost numb—along toward the drain; and was somewhat eased by the discovery that I could brace myself slightly by placing my feet against the side of the house. Foot by foot I crept along, and when I reached the drain my hands and arms were almost too numbed to risk the descent; but of course I did risk it, and I came down, badly scratched—and the scratches on my knees and legs were more painful than my bleeding, nerveless hands.

It was fully light, as light as sunrise can be on a drizzling morning. Zoronna was looking from the window, tense and motionless as a statue. Breathless, and as she afterward said, praying, she had watched. Then, woman-like, she began to cry.



THAT is the story.

All in all, from the time I stepped from the tower room until Hurgronje fell, I had been on the roof probably not over four or five minutes, though I have written of those minutes with deliberation.

At the first alarm, when I had appeared

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as by magic through the floor, Zoronna sprang up the stairs, blindly hoping to escape from the fate Hurgronje had been promising her.

At the first landing she ran into the pet gorilla, lurking there. The beast had seized her and leaped with her through the hall and into Hurgronje's room. It had been nervous, frightened, rather than angry.

It knew her and did not try to hurt her, but let her slip to the floor, and went about the room in an excited manner, disturbed by the noise of shots and voices below.

She knew the mechanism of the large statue in the room. Hurgronje had a curious, perhaps slightly crazed, interest in hollow statues; or maybe he appreciated the many uses to which they could be put.

The one there had no doubt been designed as a hiding-place for himself in the event of emergency, and was contrived so as to open, if one so wished, from the inside only; and, like the one in which she had been sent to Sin Chang, was fitted with artful vents in the head to prevent suffocation.

Zoronna, terrified, had gone into it; and she waited there, fearfully, wondering what had happened. She still had in her bosom the knife she had taken from San Toy; and she had come with it to kill Hurgronje—she had come expecting to offer to tell him something which was confidential and which she had just discovered, something highly important, so that he would see her and Lord Bob alone for a moment. In fact, Lord Bob was to pretend to be trying to bid himself back into Hurgronje's favor by bringing news of me and where I and the jewels could be found.

But they had landed, and had been overheard by the watchful, waiting guard in whispering the final instructions to each other for getting Hurgronje alone, and the signal at which to strike. When they realized that the situation was lost beyond recovery they had, of course, not offered Hurgronje any information.

Zoronna had gratefully felt that she could not ask me to come—could not let me again risk any personal danger on her behalf. Women are certainly difficult to understand.

Hurgronje had run into the room, but she did not think that he had tried to get into the statue, for almost at once she heard Lord Bob's voice. Where that master of magic had succeeded in concealing himself it would be impossible to say.

But my firing on the roof must have been what attracted him to the window; and his laughing had caused her to peer out. She thought both I and Lord Bob were dead—else why would Hurgronje laugh?

Lord Bob had been knocked unconscious. The animal, frightened, must have been trying to hide clear away from the noise, and no doubt would have killed Lord Bob—perhaps would have leaped for me too—except for the blinding flashes from the gun as I poured bullets up the stairs.

It seems reasonable to believe that I had not hit it then. Wounded gorillas are not likely to show any such composure as it showed for a time on the roof's peak.

As I said, Lord Bob had been knocked unconscious and clear across the room. He was dazed, bewildered, a little out of his head for a few minutes, when Jackman found him.

We hurried out of the house, and Jackman set to work starting the engine of Hurgronje's splendid motor-boat. We got into the boat, and I watched apprehensively while Jackman seemed to be having trouble.

Zoronna and Lord Bob were then and there indifferent to what in my opinion was the most important part of the situation; for already people, a few, were appearing outside of the yard. Lord Bob was not much of an invalid, but Zoronna's arms were protectingly, motheringly around him. I heard her whisper—

"Though he had met a thousand deaths, and none of them by my hand, I would have lived in torment!"

Though Hurgronje's house sat somewhat apart from neighbors the persistent firing on the roof had been heard distinctly; and more people were coming around, some of them appearing very hastily dressed, and all had a sort of inquisitive, half-suspicious wonderment in their faces. But as they did not come to the rather inaccessible side that abutted on the rocks and water they did not then see the evidence of tragedy.

However, some were coming closer to us, and staring wonderingly at Zoronna's picturesque Chinese dress and her strange, vivid beauty, at my torn clothes and blood-covered hands. Perhaps they were mostly servants out of near-by houses, who came or had been sent to learn what was going on.

At last some fellow spoke, and asked just

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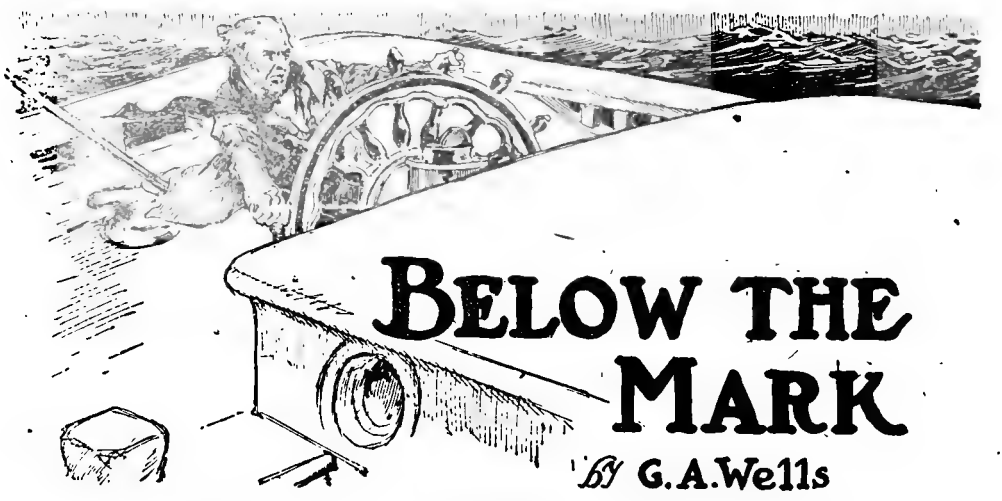
that. But the engine had stopped sputtering and missing. No one answered him, and we shoved off. The rhythmic *chug-chug-chug* carried us rapidly out, so that we soon disappeared into the gray, misty, fog-like drizzle on the bay.



BELOW THE MARK

By G. A. Wells

Author of "Clothes and the Man," "The Devil a Man Would Be," etc.

CAPTAIN IRA BROOKS sat on the end of his spine in a chair in Old Hiram Sparks' den on the second floor of Old Hiram's ship-chandler's shop on the water-front and puffed stolidly at a blackened briarwood pipe. The captain was a dapper little gentleman with blue eyes, gnarled hands, a million wrinkles and hair and beard as white as snow.

He was one of those dried-up, bantam-like men who gain either our respect or our ridicule. A strong puff of wind might have caught him up and hurled him to the moon. Yet in spite of his diminutive size there was something about him that gave one the impression of weight and physical adequacy. Nor could one have defined the thing that gave this impression.

At the moment there was a grave, troubled expression in Captain Ira's eyes, though it could not be seen by Old Hiram Sparks who stood before him, owing to the deep gloom of the room. Old Hiram seemed to be waiting for the captain to reach some important decision in his mind and as the captain did not speak Old Hiram grew impatient.

"Well?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid I can't accommodate you, Hiram," said Captain Ira with a world of reluctance in his voice.

Old Hiram grunted and turned to one of the windows and glared out into the gathering darkness. At the docks inshore the rigging of the smaller fry of sailing ships spun tangled webs against the fading sky. Farther out in the harbor lay two clumsy steamers and apart from them, as though unwilling to be seen in such degrading company, rode a large sailing ship.

The latter was the source of a good deal of bile on Old Hiram's part. There she lay at anchor, the *Narum*, two mates and a crew of nineteen men aboard, twelve hundred tons of American seed-wheat in her forward hold and almost a thousand tons of farming implements in her 'midship hold. Yet she lacked the one thing that made it possible for her to weigh anchor and sail away to her destination at Capetown.

Several silent minutes went by, then Old Hiram turned back into the room and lighted the lamp. Old Hiram belonged to the old school of seafaring men and would have none of the "dude" electric lights. The light disclosed a rare scene. Old Hirman's den was such that it might have been lifted intact and placed under a ship's quarterdeck and made to serve as the captain's cabin. Chief

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of the many nautical objects it contained was the model of a ship with all sails set suspended from the ceiling by invisible wires, a veritable "Flying Dutchman." The gilt letters on her rounded stern formed the name *Narum*.

Old Hiram threw away the burnt match with an angry gesture.

"You can accommodate me if you will, Ira," he growled. "I wouldn't ask you if I could go myself; but you know I'm called to testify in that Groggins will case and I can't be in contempt of court by sailing away about the time court convenes. And if my *Narum* don't get away in the next twenty-four hours I might as well forfeit my charter contract. You're a contrary old fool, Ira Brooks!"

"'Tain't contrariness keeps me from taking your *Narum* out, either," responded the captain spiritedly. "It's this plagued rheumatism of mine. My joints are like rusty hinges. Besides, I reckon I've about lost the knack of sailing ships. As I said, I'm below the mark."

"And as I said, Ira," rejoined Old Hiram testily, "if you don't take her out, I've got to give up my charter and have her cargo lightered to another ship at my own expense. I bet one of them darn boiler-boats would be glad enough to get her cargo!" he added angrily.

"Plenty others would jump at the chance to take the *Narum* out," ventured Captain Ira.

"I'd like mighty well to hear you name some of 'em."

Captain Ira called the names of half a dozen men whom he thought would fill the bill. At the mention of each name Old Hiram grunted scornfully.

"I wouldn't let none of 'em go cabin-boy on my *Narum*," was his verdict. "I want a seaman, Ira, not a swab with a head full of jelly. If my *Narum* can't go with a seaman on her quarter she can stay here and rot."

"I'd like terrible well to take her," the captain said wistfully. "I'm going all to pieces in retirement here ashore. But I'm not the man for that job. Below the mark, as I said. Hiram, come October and I'll turn seventy-one."

Old Hiram gave vent to a long sigh of disappointment.

"All right, Ira," he said. "I'll give up my charter. But I won't trust none of them swabs you mentioned with my *Narum*. Maybe they know steam but they don't know sail. You and me, Ira, we learnt our seamanship before the mast where it ought to be learnt. These upstarts learn theirs at nautical schools ashore. Most of 'em wouldn't know a samson-post from a galley-pot. They've got lots of nerve calling 'emselves seamen. Seamen."

"What's the matter with Ned Briscoe, Hiram?" asked the captain suddenly.

"Nothing, only he fell down a cargo hatch the other day and broke his left leg in forty places," replied Old Hiram cynically. "Ned's the only other man I'd trust with the *Narum* and he can't do a lick with that leg."

Another silence fell. Captain Ira puffed at his pipe. Old Hiram turned again to the window and glowered at the *Narum's* riding-lights. These lights incensed him still more. Only anchored vessels wear riding-lights and anchored vessels earn no money. Abruptly Old Hiram turned on his friend.

"Ira, seems like I remember," he said, "when you and me was boys together at New Bedford. We went to school together and we played together.. Your enemy was my enemy and mine was yours. We made our first trip to sea together in Tom Holden's schooner, *Blue Heavens*. It's fifty years ago since that day we sailed for the Georges in the *Blue Heavens*. We ain't been very far apart since then, Ira. Ever since we was boys we've been good friends, you and me."

He paused and looked into the captain's face searchingly. The wistfulness in the captain's blue eyes had intensified and he was fingering his beard uneasily.

"And it seems like I remember, Ira," Old Hiram went on, encouraged by what he saw, "another time you and me went to sea together in the brig *Mary Brandt*, New York to the China seas. Seems like I can recall one night when you and me was on bow watch together and we made a promise to each other. Let's see, what was that promise?"

He stopped and scratched his head a moment.

"Yes, I remember," he continued. "It was if either one of us got in any kind of trouble he was to let the other one know so he could come and help him out. I've met some folks that make promises never intending to keep 'em, and I've met others who'd keep their promises in spite of the devil and Tom Walker."

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Old Hiram paused again. Captain Ira had removed his pipe from between his teeth and was plucking hard at his beard. Old Hiram shot his master bolt.

"I'm in trouble, Ira," he said plaintively.

The captain jerked at his beard so hard a few hairs came out in his hand. He carefully knocked the ashes from his pipe and stowed the pipe away in his pocket.

"Better give me your sailing orders, Hiram," he said.

CAPTAIN IRA BROOKS went aboard the *Narum* with his sea-chest in a shore boat about ten that night and took charge from Mr. Wheeler, the mate, who seemed to be standing the anchor-watch by himself. At any rate not another man was visible about the deck when the captain went aboard his ship. Early next morning a harbor tug towed the *Narum* outside and cast her adrift on her own.

"Air's rather light this morning, Mr. Wheeler," said the captain to his mate when the tug's lines had been let go. "If we're going to do anything better than a dog-trot we'd better shake out everything that'll hold wind."

"Very well, sir," answered the mate, and went away to execute the order.

Two hours later when Captain Ira got up from the breakfast table in the cabin and came on deck the *Narum* had put all land below the rim of the sea. The captain had a glance at the binnacle to note the course, then clasped his hands behind his back and began to pace the quarter.

A wonderful, almost miraculous, change had come over Captain Ira during the past ten or twelve hours. He was an entirely different man from the one who had sat hunched on his spine in Old Hiram's den the evening before asserting his incompetency. Now he stood erect and moved with a nervous energy and his stride was that of a youngster. He had shed at least a dozen years.

As he threw his keen glances out over the gently rolling sea, forward along the deck and aloft at the clouds of bellying canvas there crept into his blue eyes a light that had not rested there in many a long day. It was the light of peace and contentment.

Captain Ira had been retired ashore for the past three years. There were two main reasons for his retirement. For one he thought that his rheumatism was so bad at sixty-eight that the rigors of an active seafaring life which exposed him to all sorts and conditions of weather were hardly beneficial to his ailment.

For another the modern steamship with its proportionately cheaper cost of operation had all but driven the "tall water" sailing ships from the seven seas, and as his owners had intimated that probably within the year they would be retiring his command and substituting a steamer the captain had resigned voluntarily rather than have his ship pulled from under him to leave him suspended like the Halabi's coffin 'twixt heaven and earth.

Of course it would have been the logical thing for Captain Ira to jump from sail to steam, but he had not for a moment considered the change. It is a difficult matter to teach an old dog new tricks. Moreover, Captain Ira despised steamships because of the havoc they had wrought among the sailing vessels. He would not make terms with an enemy.

So for these two main reasons he had retired, and with the exception of half a dozen or so short trips in coasting schooners he had not been to sea since. He lived with his widowed daughter and her little girl in a pretty cottage standing on a hill overlooking the harbor. His mornings were spent puttering about the house and garden, his afternoons strolling along the docks or lounging at the seamen's club listening to the gossip of the sea, and invariably after an early supper he repaired to Old Hiram's den for the daily battle of checkers.

During the first few months of the new life the novelty of it was interesting enough, but with the constant repetition of it, it began to pall. The captain compared his life with the hands of a clock. Round and round they went through the same old circles, getting nowhere except back to the starting-point. In due time he grew restless, fretful, pettishly discontented, and when he looked ahead and saw the empty monotonous years of retirement staring him in the face his discontent knew no bounds.

He could have felt no worse had he been a prisoner in chains. He came cordially to hate the pretty cottage on the hill. He swore at his rheumatism, making a rite of it almost. He plucked at his beard ferociously and cursed the steamers that came and went in the harbor. Day by day his

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hate for the steamers grew and he shook his fist at them so energetically that only a sudden twinge in the arm would apprise him that not all the blame for his retirement could be laid at the door of the despised steamships.

The three years ashore in retirement were miserable enough for the old sea-dog. He rusted and he rotted and every day became more and more dissatisfied with his lot. At times he wished himself dead. Nor could his daughter comfort him. Nothing would comfort him save the feel of a heaving deck under his feet, the wash of blue water against a ship's sides, to see a ship's sails billowing overhead. The only cure for what ailed him was active command of a sailing ship.

Thus it came about that when Old Hiram Sparks was summoned to testify before the court and needed a skipper to take his place on the quarterdeck of his beloved *Narum* he had little difficulty persuading Captain Ira to accept the command. The wistfulness in the captain's eyes and the yearning in his voice had not escaped Old Hiram. The captain's excuse of being below the mark had been none too sincerely spoken. Old Hiram could read his friend like an open book.

As a matter of fact Captain Ira had offered his excuse merely out of fairness to Old Hiram. He honestly did believe that he was physically incapable of giving full measure of service and when he accepted the commission he made himself a mental promise to give the best that was in him. Then if he failed to perform properly he would have nothing to reproach himself with. The fault would be Old Hiram's.

And now the captain's most earnest wish had come true and he was once more in active command of a sailing ship destined to a port far across blue water. His heart bubbled with gladness.

The mate came to the quarterdeck and broke in upon the captain's pleasant musings.

"How do you find your people, Mr. Wheeler?" the captain asked.

"Not much, sir," the mate answered. "Mr. Scott, the second, a new man this trip, is tolerable, but I can't say much for the rest. Not a decent man forward, sir; just trimmings. It's mighty hard to get good seamen these days, captain, what with the steamers crowding us the way they do. Steam has about done for sail, sir."

"It has that, Mr. Wheeler," growled the captain.

"Subject to your approval, captain, I picked a bosun and a carpenter out of what we have forward. Any orders, sir?"

"Nothing for the present. We're making about ten knots now the wind has freshened and the barometer promises settled weather for a time. You may observe the usual routine and let her go as she is."

"Very good, sir."

"And Mr. Wheeler, I want you to have your meals in the after cabin hereafter. If Mr. Scott is willing bunk your bosun and carpenter in the forward house with him."

"Thank you, Captain Brooks."

THE days passed. A steady wind held and wafted the *Narum* down into the trades and up to the time she crossed the line not a rope had been touched except to slack away the standing rigging as it dried out in the hot sun.

Occasionally a smudge of smoke on the horizon denoted the proximity of a steamer, and once they spoke a six-masted schooner from the African coast with mahogany logs for Norfolk. But for the most part the *Narum* had the sea to herself.

She was four days from her destination when the captain observed to himself that it looked like an uneventful voyage. In a way he regretted its uneventfulness. His secret heart sighed for an opportunity to discover whether he had lost his knack for seamanship and command.

And the desire of his secret heart was to be gratified for that very afternoon the steady wind fell to a whisper. In a short while it went altogether and the sails shivered. The sea became like glass. The sky assumed a copperish hue. The air was oppressive and felt sticky. The barometer in the cabin hatch registered 29.14. Then a bank of purple-black clouds rolled up over the northern horizon.

"Looks nasty, sir," called the mate from the port waist.

For a space of two or three minutes Captain Ira made no reply. His gaze was fixed calculatingly upon the rapidly approaching cloud-bank.

"Take in everything but the main and foretops'l, Mr. Wheeler," he ordered crisply at length. "Close reef 'em both. Yes, and you might leave out the fore to'gallant

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stays'l, Mr. Wheeler. She'll carry that much, I think."

The mate hurried forward at a run, growling to himself that if he were in command he would have in everything but the sticks. That was a real blow coming down on them or he didn't know the signs.

"All hands!" he yelled down the forecastle hatch.

In the dead silence that had fallen about the ship the mate's voice sounded like a peal of thunder. Men with scowling faces came lumbering up the hatch and at a sharp word from the mate they scrambled for the yards and pin-rails.

Captain Ira had another look at the barometer. It had fallen ominously within a few moments. Yet not so much as a cat's paw marred the glassy surface of the sea and the sails hung listless. Except for the tumbling bank of clouds coming down from the north the world seemed at a standstill.

Presently a long white line extending clear across the horizon from east to west appeared. The captain noted with a sense of relief that all sails were in except those he had ordered left out, though these had not yet been reefed. However, four men were moving out along the foreyards and reaching for the reef points on the foretops'l.

The second mate and several men were stowing the jibs in the eyes. Mr. Wheeler was standing atop the deck-house amidships, one eye on his men and the other on the advancing white line.

"Lively, there!" he bellowed at the men on the foreyard. "Shake a leg! All ——'s coming aboard here in a minute!"

But less than a minute passed before "all ——" came aboard. A solid wall of water at least twenty feet high bore down on the ship from the port quarter.

"Pay off and let it have her!" screeched Captain Ira at the top of his voice.

He leaped to the wheel and helped the helmsman throw it down. Then the wind and the water struck and for a space the ship was buried deep. She fell far over to lee and shuddered like a thing alive, seeming to consider whether to go to pieces or hold together. She finally decided on the latter course and straightened and went flying away before the terrific push of wind and water.

The loosed foresail ballooned, held a moment, then burst from its bolt ropes and disappeared in the smother off the starboard bow like a monstrous flapping bird. The fore topgallantstaysail followed on its heels. Then the big mainsail went, straddling against the foremast where it whipped itself to shreds in no time at all. In passing over the deck-house it swept the mate to the deck.

Captain Ira clung to the wheel with the helmsman and peered forward, but the air was so thick with driving water he could see scarcely half a dozen feet before him. Shortly the air cleared sufficiently for him to see the length of the ship.

The deck was a mess. Water foamed and boiled everywhere. Tangles of rope and bits of wreckage sloshed about. Only stark stanchions marked where the port rail had been. A corner of the deck-house was smashed in. Not a living soul could he see forward on the deck, although two men twined their legs and arms about the lee fore yardarm. The two men who had been on the weather foreyard were gone.

The helmsman touched the captain's arm and pointed at something that washed about in the starboard waterway. It was Mr. Wheeler's body. Any moment a sea was likely to lift him over the rail. The captain watched his chance and darted forward. He seized one of the mate's arms and dragged him aft through a smother of water and down the hatch to the cabin, where he dumped him on the deck. Whether Mr. Wheeler were dead or alive the captain did not then know and there was no time to stop and find out, so up the hatch he went.

As he stepped out on deck a big sea came in from over the stern and picked him up and carried him forward. He felt himself being rolled and jounced along the deck and flung out his arms for anchorage. One of his hands clutched a ring-bolt and he clung to it desperately. Another sea smashed down upon him and nearly caved in his ribs.

When the water cleared he staggered to his knees and gasped the air back into his lungs. He swept a quick glance aloft and saw that the hastily stowed bunt of the foresail was working loose. In a few minutes the wind would blow it out. The *Narum* had lost enough canvas already and the captain swore that she should lose no more. He opened his lips to hurl an order to the two men who had been on the fore yardarm but they were not there. While the captain lay buried under the last sea they had scrambled down and sought refuge in the deck-house.

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The captain crawled over to the forecastle hatch and threw back the cover.

"On deck, half a dozen of you, and restow your fo's'l!" he bawled.

Not a head appeared in the hatch in answer to his command. He spat out an oath and flung himself over the hatch coaming and down the ladder. An avalanche of water followed him. In the semi-darkness of the forecastle he saw a dozen or more men standing about wringing the water from their clothes. One man was roughly trying to spring another's shoulder-joint back into place.

"What fool opened that hatch?" yelled somebody.

"I opened that hatch!" shrilled the captain. "Get on deck, some of you loafers, and restow that fo's'l before it blows out!"

"Stow yer own sails, skipper," replied a huge sort of man standing near-by. "We don't want ter git washed off this ol' hooker."

The captain's blood boiled at the insolence of the man. In his younger days he had been counted something of a man-driver. He was slow to anger and a fair and square man to sail with; but wo unto him who did not toe the mark.

"You don't, don't you?" he snapped. "None of your lip or you'll get worse than washed off this old hooker! Up you go now, and the last man up gets it good! Run!"

He caught the big man a jolt under the chin that shook him like an earthquake. Before the man could recover the captain smashed him again and he hit the deck. Captain Ira gave him a passing kick and leaped at the others. He struck out right and left, landing every time. And he also used his feet with good effect for the odds were greatly against him.

It was the sheer audacity of it that struck consternation to the men. His attack was swift and cyclonic and they tried to dodge. But there was little success at dodging that little fury on two nimble legs. The captain was everywhere at once, punching and kicking for all he was worth.

"On the roof!" he shrilled between smashes on jaws and chins.

The big man was the first to break for the ladder and up he went as if the devil himself were after him. The others followed like sheep and vied to see which could be first on deck. The seventh and last men was fairly kicked up the hatch.

"Now get at that fo's'l!" screamed the captain in order to make himself heard above the roar of the wind.

What with the shriek of the gale, the seas washing clean over the deck-house and the ship plunging and wallowing like mad it was a difficult job to get the foresail restowed, but it was finally accomplished and the captain dismissed his men with a wave of the hand. They lost no time getting into the forecastle and slamming the hatch-cover down after them.

Captain Ira fought his way aft and down to the cabin. He found the mate's body in a corner where it had rolled and jammed. The captain pulled him out and found him alive but unconscious. He soon had him revived with a glass of brandy and the mate tried to get on his feet. But he sank back with a groan and reached for his right ankle.

"Sprained," grunted the captain. "And you got a nasty cut on the back of your head. Here, let me help you to your berth, Mr. Wheeler."

ALL night the storm roared. The wind howled like a thousand mad demons and the big seas banged down on the deck and threatened to cave it in. Through it all the captain stayed by the quarterdeck. Five times during the night he battled his way to the forecastle and literally drove one of the skulking crew aft to relieve the wheel.

With morning came comparative quiet. The clouds rolled back and showed a sky of wonderful blue. The sea was yet running high and the wind was stiff, but now the ship rode over the crests of the waves instead of trying to butt through them.

At daylight the captain went below to get into dry togs and snatch a bite to eat and drink a cup of hot coffee which he brewed in a pot over an alcohol lamp in the cabin. He rebound Mr. Wheeler's ankle and head and went back on deck, leaving the mate in his berth swearing at the luck that would keep him inactive for a couple of weeks.

On deck Captain Ira took stock of his ship and her crew. The crew had suffered more than the ship. Six men, including the second mate, had gone overboard, leaving two officers and fourteen men to work the ship to Capetown.

Mr. Wheeler, however, was not fit for active duty and hardly counted. To make matters worse the men forward had shown a

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sudden disposition to be mutinous and the captain realized that he had his work cut out for him. But he was pleased rather than depressed with the situation. He called the boatswain and carpenter aft for orders.

"Bosun, you're second temporarily," he said.

"Don't want it," growled the boatswain, an evil-faced fellow.

"Take it anyhow, bosun, it'll do you good," returned the captain. "Shake out the fo's'l and jib and have your gang bring up new sails and bend 'em on where needed. And you, Chips, try your hand at patching. Bear a hand now and stow your grumbling."

The captain went below that morning just three times; twice to see how Mr. Wheeler was making out and once to get his sextant and chronometer. It was evident that both the boatswain and the carpenter were as sulky as any man forward and the captain perforce stuck close to the deck to see that his commands were carried out.

By noon new sails from the lockers below had been bent on to replace those that had been blown out in the storm and the deck had been made presentable. At noon also Captain Ira "shot" the sun and with the mate's aid worked out the ship's position on the chart in the cabin. He was gratified to discover that the *Narum* had not been blown out of her course a great deal. In fact, they were not many minutes south of Capetown's latitude.

"Easting does it, eh, Mr. Wheeler?" the captain said.

He went on deck and gave the course to the helmsman; then below again to his dinner. The cook had been one of those washed overboard and the captain had told off another man to take charge of the galley; thus the meal set on the cabin table was not of a quality to tempt an epicure. But a hungry dog growls not at a dirty bone.

"Now then, Mr. Wheeler," said the captain after dinner. "Do you think if I had a couple of men carry you up to the quarter in a chair you could keep an eye on things up there while I get a little sleep?"

"I was going to suggest that very thing, captain," answered the mate. "What do you want, you?"

This to a man who at that moment thrust his head into the open skylight above them.

"Skipper, Chips says the ol' tub's full o' water for'ard," the man announced.

And with that he marched away. The captain frowned and the mate swore.

"Fine discipline aboard this ship," commented Captain Ira sourly. "Skipper! I'll skipper some of 'em! I'll go have a look at the trouble, Mr. Wheeler."

"Don't forget to send those men for me, captain," the mate called after him as he went up the hatch.

Mr. Wheeler waited all of twenty minutes, then as neither the captain nor the men he was to send after the mate showed up, Mr. Wheeler assayed the deck on his own. Finally, with many a groan and grunt of pain, he made it and seated himself on one of the quarterdeck bitt-heads in the shade of the mainsail.

He saw the captain forward busily overseeing the rigging of two pumps, one on either side of the deck. Presently the pumps were rigged and two healthy streams of water were spurting overside. When the captain espied the mate on the quarter he came back.

"I clean forgot you, Mr. Wheeler," the captain said apologetically.

"I carried myself up, sir," explained the mate. "How did you find her, captain? Not bad, I hope."

"Not good, either, Mr. Wheeler. There's a foot of water under the forward hold, which comes of having a jackass for a carpenter. If he's sounded his wells since we left port I'm a greasy cook."

"I attended to the wells myself, captain, and up to yesterday noon she didn't show a sign of water. This one's generally as tight as a miser's purse. She must have opened a seam last night."

"Yes, a dozen of 'em, Mr. Wheeler. She's full of open seams in the bends under her forward hold. She's double bottom, as you likely know, with a clearance of about thirty inches between. I crawled in there to have a look. Squint your eye over me, Mr. Wheeler."

The mate had already squinted his eye over his superior officer. From head to feet the captain was literally plastered with muck. Even his beard was smeared with the black ooze from the *Narum's* double bottoms.

"I put the carpenter and six men to work in there with caulking-irons to find and stop the leaks," the captain went on. "I had to drive 'em to it, sir, had to drive 'em to their lawful duty. I tell you that's a nasty

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gang we've got forward and I don't understand 'em at all. Do you, Mr. Wheeler?"

"Possibly, captain," replied the mate with the ghost of a smile. "You see, sir, every man forward is a shanghaied man, bosun and all."

"Shanghaied! Shanghaied!" wheezed the captain. "You mean to tell me Old Hiram Sparks——"

"No, sir, I don't. Captain Sparks knew nothing about it, sir. It's this way, captain. Captain Sparks told me to get the *Narum* a crew and I turned the job over to a shipping-master, a friend of mine. As I said before, sir, it's no easy job to get a crew for a wind-jammer these days with steam offering better hours and more pay. I had to get my crew the best way I could. Most of 'em come aboard drunk, and them that wasn't drunk had been knocked out one way or another. That's why she was anchored offshore when you came aboard. I didn't want my men to run away."

"Blast me!" growled the captain. "But I didn't suspect it, Mr. Wheeler, I really didn't. I never saw a shanghaied crew so contented as this one we've got. That is, up to last night."

"That's because I didn't drive 'em and saw that they were well fed, sir," Mr. Wheeler explained. "I let 'em loaf and have it easy. Now we've run into a bit of bad weather they're acting up."

"A fine crew to go to sea with!" snorted the captain. "It's against my principles to shanghai a man, Mr. Wheeler; it certainly is. These men are going to make trouble for us before we get to port. And I don't blame 'em a bit. But I'll run this ship or know why."

"Whatever comes I'm prepared for it, captain," the mate said.

He pulled open his shirt and showed Captain Ira the butt of a revolver. The captain grunted.

"I've never armed myself against my men," he said stiffly. "Bear in mind I won't have any promiscuous shooting aboard this ship."

"I'll bear it in mind, captain."

The captain went below to bathe and change his clothing and was on deck again in no time. With a shanghaied crew, now ugly and apparently aggressive, he did not dare risk the deck with a crippled mate, even though the mate were armed.

BEFORE very long Captain Ira saw that the men at the pumps were prone to loaf on the job, working the brakes half-heartedly. He had to keep a sharp eye on them and frequently go forward himself to stir them up. They soon grew accustomed to his visits, however, and became constantly harder to manage. By noon they were openly hostile and he heard them passing slurring remarks about him in his presence.

Things came to a head about four o'clock that afternoon. The men at the brakes seemed to be asleep and the streams of water that came from them would scarcely have wet a cat, though Captain Ira knew perfectly well that there was yet plenty of water in the hold to be pumped out. He went forward to jack them up.

The big man whom he had knocked down in the forecastle, Drake by name, who seemed to be the ring-leader, was at one of the brakes of the starboard pump. He was regaling his mates with a story of his personal experiences.

"An' I sez ter him, I sez, 'skipper, yer agoin' ter stretch that there arm o' your'n a bit too far one o' these days,' I sez."

It would appear that Captain Ira had caught the man in the middle of his yarn.

"An' I sez ter him, I sez," the man went on when he saw that he had the captain's attention, "I sez ter him, 'skipper, you may be a bucko, but you don't bucko me,' I sez. 'What'll you do, my man?' sez he. 'What'll I do?' sez I. 'Yes, what'll you do?' sez he. 'Well,' sez I, 'I'll do enough. This bucko business don't set well on my stommick,' sez I, 'an' I'm not the lad ter let you knock me eround,' I sez ter him. 'I know where I stand,' I sez, 'an' if you try any o' yer bucko tricks on me, skipper, I'll show yer a few tricks of my own,' sez I. 'I'll do fer you good an' proper,' sez I."

"Did you?" some one asked.

"I did, matey, an' this day, dead or alive, he's got the marks of it somewheres erbout him."

He stopped and leered at the captain from the corner of his eye. The captain heard a low chuckle run from man to man.

"You, there!" he snapped at an idler. "Relieve that man!"

The idler growlingly obeyed and Drake was only too glad to give up his place at the brake.

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"Come here, you!" ordered Captain Ira, crooking his finger at Drake.

The man swaggered insolently toward the captain. The captain launched himself forward to meet him and sent his knotted fist crashing against his jaw. Drake, big as he was, went down. The captain glared at the others truculently.

"Anybody else want to try his luck today?" he challenged.

The men muttered among themselves, but none of them stepped forth to the slaughter. Captain Ira had demonstrated the fact that he was a terror with his fists. Drake got to his feet rubbing his jaw. The captain stood on the defensive, but the other made no advances.

"I'll have the law on you when we gits ashore, you —— cat!" he threatened.

"All right," responded Captain Ira affably. "You're your own man when you're ashore, but on this ship you're my man. That goes for the crowd of you. I guess you all know by this time that Mr. Wheeler is down with a game leg and I'm officering this ship by myself. And I can do it, don't forget that. Do your work and I'll treat you square; shirk it and I'll eat you up, horns, hide and hair. I can do that too if it comes necessary. Don't come to me for trouble——"

Abruptly the captain leaped aside. A heavy wooden belaying-pin swished through the air where his head had been but a moment before. It had come from the port side of the deck. An almost imperceptible movement and a look of expectancy on the faces of the men in front of him warned the captain of danger behind.

He whirled about. A man standing near the port pump stood with his arm still raised after firing the belaying-pin at the captain's head. A hoarse voice behind at that moment ripped out an oath and the captain turned instantly. A revolver cracked. The man Drake let out a howl and a knife fell from his hand and rattled on the deck.

"I've got 'em covered, captain!" cried Mr. Wheeler from the quarter, where he sat on a bitt-head with a smoking revolver in his hand.

The captain looked at the knife on the deck a moment, then fetched it a kick that sent it flying into the sea.

"So you want war, eh?" he said. "All right, I'll do what I can to make it a howling success. Now get back to your pumps!"

Cowed by the blaze in Captain Ira's eyes and the suggestive turnings of the mate's revolver, the men returned to their work. The captain went back to the quarterdeck.

"Thank you, Mr. Wheeler," he said to the mate. "Do you happen to have another pistol in your chest? The rest of this voyage is going to be a merry little ——, I take it."

"You'll find a .38-caliber and a box of shells under the mattress in my berth, captain," replied the mate.

•

LATE that evening the mate's ankle began to swell prodigiously and the captain and the cook had to carry him down and put him in his berth. That circumstance did much to soothe the captain's conscience about arming himself against his crew. The mate argued stoutly that he would be as well off standing a deck-watch as he would be lying in his bunk, but the captain would not hear of it.

"That ankle can't stand deck-watch, Mr. Wheeler, so right there in your berth you stay," Captain Ira settled the matter definitely. "I can stand all the watches on this ship until we get in. It won't be the first time in my life I've done it. You stay where you are and keep quiet."

And stand all watches the captain did. The night wore along slowly and he paced the quarterdeck incessantly in order to keep awake. His age was telling on him and he could not remember when he had been so sleepy. He had not had a wink of sleep for almost forty-eight hours and there was good prospect that he would get no sleep for another forty-eight hours.

Fortunately, the crew had taken its lesson to heart and gave the captain little trouble at the pumps. No doubt the helmsman who had been at the wheel when Captain Ira requested the loan of a revolver from the mate had reported the business forward and most men dread offering themselves as a mark for a bullet.

By nightfall a steady wind had come and there was practically no work to be done on the sails. Everything was spread and drawing nicely and the *Narum* was doing about twelve knots an hour. About three o'clock in the morning the captain heard Mr. Wheeler singing down in the cabin. He glanced through the cabin skylight and saw the mate hopping about on one leg. He

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hastened below and led Mr. Wheeler hopping back to his berth, then mixed a soothing draft from the medicine-chest and poured it down the mate's throat. Mr. Wheeler soon fell into an uneasy slumber.

"Heavy weather ahead for you, Ira," the captain muttered with a grim smile. "Your mate out of his head and mutineers forward. I'd better relieve you of that pistol, Mr. Wheeler."

He got the mate's revolver and dropped it in one of his own pockets and went back on deck. It was pitch dark and he could see but little forward of the wheel. He sent a glance at the helmsman.

"My ——!" he jerked out.

The wheel was without a helmsman. At the moment the wind was not strong enough to make it dangerous, but at the same time it was risky for a ship with all sails set to be without a helmsman for an instant. Desertion of the wheel on the high seas is one of the super-crimes of the sea.

The captain jumped to the wheel and sent a quick glance into the lighted binnacle. The *Narum* had strayed a full point off her course. He swore and put her back, then lashed the wheel with the signal halyard and drew one of his two revolvers. There was a suspicious absence of sound and motion forward. He should at least hear the swish of the pumps. Instead he heard nothing.

"At the pumps, there!" he called. "Bosun, come aft!"

He waited a reasonable length of time and getting no answer he hailed again, louder. Still no answer. Yet he imagined he did hear a slight noise at the lee rail. It sounded very much like the creaking of a tackle-block.

"What's going on forward, there?" he bellowed.

At that the creaking sound grew louder and the captain heard a low exclamation. This was followed by a splash. Captain Ira, gun in hand, rushed forward. Just as he reached the lee rail about the waist a man leaped overboard. The captain peered overside and could barely make out a whaleboat with five men in it and another climbing in over the stern. The boat was shoving off.

"Where the blazes you going with that boat?" the captain shrilled. "Back you come! Back, I tell you!"

But the boat kept on and quickly disappeared in the night. Then came a cry from the boat.

"Ter —— wi' you an' yer dirty hooker!"

Captain Ira jerked up his gun and sent six shots zipping in the general direction of the voice. A taunting laugh greeted the salvo and impotently he hurled the empty revolver at his mockers. He pulled his other gun but did not fire.

He stood there by the rail fuming and pulling at his beard. For a time he heard the clacking of oars in their locks, then the sound died out in the distance. As far as he could see there was no reason for this desertion of part of his crew hundreds of miles from land and he could not begin to understand it. They could have reached land a good deal sooner aboard the *Narum* than in the whaleboat.

"Eight men left," he grumbled. "Eight men and every rag on her out to the wind. A sudden blow would play the very dickens. ——! Guess I'd better get in some of this canvas right now. Bosun! Oh, bosun!"

He got no answer. In high dudgeon he strode across the deck to the weather side and there he got a shock. The falls of the port whaleboat were swinging free from the davits and the whaleboat was gone. The captain was stunned. While he had been trying to head off the desertion of six men in the starboard whaleboat the remainder of his crew had stolen the port whaleboat and gone.

"Blast their souls!" he cried.

He pulled at his beard furiously. He realized that it was futile to call further for his crew, for there was no crew. It had deserted in a body, leaving the *Narum* with all sail set to sink or float, to wander off to the south pole or make port as her luck would have it.

IT WAS indeed a big situation. Consider a two-thousand-ton ship with all sails set something more than two hundred miles from the nearest port and only two men aboard. Consider further that one of those men was crippled and of no use whatever in handling the ship. Upon Captain Ira Brooks alone rested the responsibility.

Is it any wonder that he was stunned? It was enough to stun the stoutest-hearted man. There was but one ray of light through the darkness. A medium steady wind blew from the port quarter. If it

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held as it was there was no great danger. If it grew stronger there was nothing to do but cut the halyards and let the sails fly. Should a sudden squall come down on her—well, the underwriters would write her off as a total loss.

"*M-m!* What's that?" the captain asked himself.

He lifted his nose and sniffed. The odor came strongest from forward. He walked slowly toward the forecastle, sniffing as he went. His nose eventually led him to the forecastle hatch where the odor was strongest of all. In the graying darkness that announces the approach of dawn he saw a thin wisp of smoke rise from the edge of the hatch. Another followed, then another and still another. Captain Ira watched the wisps of smoke spellbound for a few moments.

"And fire to boot," he said with a sigh.

The cover of the hatch was down. He heaved it back and tumbled down the ladder. He was almost strangled by the clouds of smoke that rushed past him up the hatch before he could whip a handkerchief from his pocket and bind it over his mouth and nostrils. He could see no sign of fire anywhere, though he went quickly from bunk to bunk along both sides of the forecastle looking for it.

By chance he laid one of his hands against the thick bulkhead that separated the forecastle from the forward hold. It was warm, almost hot. Then he understood.

"That —— wheat!" he said savagely.

In a bracket on one of the stanchions a lantern burned smokily. He snatched it down and examined the bulkhead closely. He found numerous streamers of smoke issuing from the cracks between the thick planks of the bulkhead. He set the lantern down and went up the hatch at a bound. In a locker on deck he found caulking-tools and a bundle of oakum and dived down into the forecastle again.

He attacked the bulkhead ferociously. Daylight came and he worked on, pounding oakum into the cracks with mallet and iron. Noon came and went and still he worked. He progressed so slowly he wondered at times whether he progressed at all. As fast as he sealed up one crack the smoke burst from another. Frequently he was forced to stop for his very life and go to the hatch for a breath of fresh air.

IT WAS well along in the afternoon before he got the last crack caulked tight. By that time the forecastle had cleared and not a sign of smoke came from the bulkhead. The captain had done his job well. During all that time he had not once set foot on deck. What with a smoldering fire in the wheat that threatened the ship he did not dare lose a single minute.

However, the *Narum's* wheel was lashed and the captain trusted to Providence to keep her on her proper course. When it is considered that it is the nature of a square-rigged ship to yaw all over the ocean without a hand at the wheel to steady her it is readily understood that Captain Ira had delegated Providence a big job.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the captain threw down his tools and climbed the ladder to the deck. He was fairly gasping and his eyes were red-rimmed and running water copiously. Sweat ran in rivulets down his body. His clothes were torn. There were numerous cuts and scratches on his hands and face.

He sank down on the hatch coaming and sucked the cool, sweet air into his lungs. Five, ten, fifteen minutes he sat there, then he got up wearily and dragged himself to the quarterdeck.

A gasp of joy escaped his lips when he glanced into the binnacle. Providence had treated him kindly, for the *Narum* was on her proper course as truly as if an experienced hand had been at the wheel every moment. The captain was fairly amazed at the miracle of it. As long as he had gone to sea he had never before known a square-rigger with all her sails out to keep her course hour after hour as this one had done without a helmsman. Surely something besides good luck rode aboard the *Narum*.

"Old girl, you're a wonder!" the captain cried, patting the wheel. "I wonder now if you could stick to it a while longer while I go down and see about my sick and get something to eat. Steady as you are, beauty. I'll be back in a shake."

He gave the wheel another affectionate pat and stumbled over to the cabin hatch and down. On the cabin table he found a cup with cold dregs of coffee in the bottom and some cracker crums. These had not been there the last time he was in the cabin. Apparently the mate had been up and about. Moreover, he was sane again.

The captain lighted the alcohol lamp and

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set the half-filled coffee-pot on the grid to boil, then he stepped across the passageway to the mate's room and stood in the doorway looking at him. Mr. Wheeler was lying in his berth asleep. The captain called him and he opened his eyes and started when he caught sight of Captain Ira.

"Ain't I a sight?" the captain chuckled. "Ain't I though! Since daylight I've been in the fo'csle fighting a fire, Mr. Wheeler."

"Fire!"

"Yes, sir, we've got a conflagration aboard this ship, Mr. Wheeler. It's that wheat in the forward hold. Spontaneous combustion, I take it. I never did like wheat cargo; I've had it take fire under me before. Nasty stuff to handle."

"Fire!" repeated the mate. "Then we'll be taking to the boats?"

"There are no boats, Mr. Wheeler."

"No boats!"

"She carried only two whaleboats, as you know, and the crew stole both of 'em before daylight and shoved off."

"The hounds!" the mate snarled.

He rose and swung his feet to the deck, letting out a grunt of pain when his badly swollen ankle grazed the edge of the berth.

"I wondered what made 'em cut loose that way," the captain continued. "It was that fire. They knew it all the time and never a peep to us. They left us here to roast, that's what."

"And we're like to roast, too."

"No danger of that now, Mr. Wheeler," the captain assured him. "When I went down to the fo'casle the bulkhead was leaking smoke like a sieve. I caulked it up tight as a drum-head. That'll choke it off and smother it out. I've done it before. She's not taking any more water either and that's something to be thankful for. ——! I was never so tired and sleepy in my life. I'd give a thousand dollars for an hour's sleep."

"How much sail on her, captain?" asked the mate.

The captain was swaying unsteadily on his feet. Standing up, he had gone to sleep and the mate had to repeat his question.

"Oh, sail? Everything—everything but royals, Mr. Wheeler. But the wind's holding light and steady and she won't hurt herself. If it comes on to blow I'll cut and let 'em fly. Never was so sleepy—in—my life."

"Then you'd better tumble into your berth and have a nap, captain. I'll crawl up on deck and keep an eye on her."

"You stay right where you are," answered Captain Ira with gruff kindness. "I'm about three days behind on sleep now and another day or so won't kill me. We'll be walking into Table Bay this time tomorrow."

"Captain, who was at the wheel all the time you were below?"

"I had a becket on her, Mr. Wheeler."

"You mean——"

Mr. Wheeler stopped and stared at the captain with amazement.

"Yes, she did, Mr. Wheeler, and with all her sail out to boot. If you want to know what I think I'll say the good Lord is at the wheel right this min——"

"What's that, sir?"

Mr. Wheeler lifted a silencing hand. They heard a hail that sounded hard by. The captain made for the hatch and went up on deck. Close aboard on the port beam was a two-masted schooner. Five men lined her starboard rail and another stood at her wheel.

"Ahoy, *Narúm!*" one of the men at the rail hailed.

"Ahoy, yourself!" returned Captain Ira. "Who are you and what do you want?"

"*Ann Richmond,* Natal to Capetown. We thought you were abandoned."

"You did, did you? Not yet. I'm terrible short-handed but I reckon I can get along."

"How many hands you got?"

"One."

"One? That is short-handed. I can let you have two men——"

"Much oblige'."

"Or I can put a line aboard and——"

"What the —— do I want with a line from you?" exploded the captain. "Ain't I got enough sail on this one to give her headway? You're looking for salvage, ain't you, mister? You won't get it if you hang around here till judgment day. I'll get this one to port all right."

"If it starts to blow——"

"Now, sonny, you needn't worry about a blow on my account."

"I never seen a square-rigger steer herself that way before," sung out another man.

"Nor me," admitted the captain. "But you see this one doing it, don't you? She's been steering that way twelve hours now."

The schooner was not so far away that

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the captain could not see the men look at each other incredulously.

"You going to tell that tale when you get in?" came from the schooner.

"I ain't that big a fool," rejoined Captain Ira with a laugh.

"Sure you don't want any help?"

"Not today."

"All right; we'll stand by."

"That's your business."

"If you change your mind any time give us a hail."

Captain Ira did not answer that. The schooner drew off to about three hundred yards on the port beam and there she remained the night out. And all night long the captain of the *Narum* strode to and fro along his deck and was alert for a change of wind. Not for a moment did he stop; he was afraid to stop. To stop meant sleep and sleep meant disaster. So he kept moving.

BUT for all his indifference toward the kind offers of the schooner *Ann Richmond* to assist him Captain Ira got a good deal of comfort from the green eye that stared at him from her starboard side. He likened the *Ann Richmond* to a buzzard wheeling over a field wherein a steer lay dying. The *Ann Richmond* was after salvage and salvage the *Narum* would have been from the moment the schooner's line was fastened to a bitt aboard her. Captain Ira was determined that nobody should get salvage out of Old Hiram Sparks' *Narum* if he could help it.

That night seemed a century long to the captain. When morning came he was bleary-eyed and his lids felt like lead. He was footsore and weary. He stripped himself and poured several buckets of cool sea water over his head and was somewhat refreshed. The clothes he had taken off were of little account except for rags, so he heaved them overboard and went below and rigged himself out in others he got from his sea-chest. After a breakfast of a cup of coffee and two cheese sandwiches he returned to the deck and took up his watch over the *Narum*.

About ten o'clock that morning the wind freshened considerably and the *Ann Richmond* drew in expectantly. But Captain Ira laughed at her and drew his knife and cut the halyards on everything except the mainsail, foresail, fore topsail, staysails and jibs. Even then she heeled a good bit. But the captain vowed he would cut no more; he would need his headsails to run her into her anchorage at Table Bay and he had no way of getting the sails up again once they came down.

But when an hour later the wind was blowing half a gale and the *Narum* was dipping her lee rail under the captain almost regretted his vow. The *Ann Richmond* was making bad weather of it and hauled off. The captain grinned at her.

"You'll be needing a line yourself before long," he chuckled.

When the wind first began to stiffen the captain had taken the wheel, and now a sudden jerk of it brought him back to his own particular business. At three o'clock he sighted Table Mountain. His "easting" had turned the trick. By five o'clock he was about three miles off Capetown and the now full gale was hurling the *Narum* along at a sixteen-knot gait under headsails alone. So far over did she heel, the captain wondered what kept her from going over completely. The *Ann Richmond* was just barely discernible under bare poles far off on the port quarter.

Captain Ira slipped beckets over the spokes of the wheel and ran forward. It was a dangerous thing to do but there was nothing else he could do. If all sail wasn't taken off her immediately she would smash into the shipping at the docks or go sliding so far up on the beach she would never come off again.

The captain slashed one halyard after another and let the sails fly. He sped on to the forecastle and snatched up a hammer. He cut the anchor-chain stops, then gave the trigger of the dog that held the two-ton anchor on the billboard a blow that set it off. He jumped clear and the big chain went clanking thunderously through the hawse pipe. The docks were less than half a mile dead ahead.

Eighty fathoms of chain ran out before the captain snubbed it. He flung himself flat on the deck. The *Narum* ran on until she had taken up all the slack in her chain, then she was brought up standing. She shook violently from stem to stern with the shock. The captain expected to see her masts snap short off, but, though they sprung like whip stalks, they held. The *Narum* rounded to and faced the gale head-on.

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It required some effort on Captain Ira's part to get to his feet and walk aft. He all but fell down the cabin hatch. At the door of the mate's room he stopped a minute.

"We're in, Mr. Wheeler," he said in a thick voice. "Won't nobody come out to us—till this weather—moderates—so I'm going to turn in—and get a little sleep. Feel that plagued rheumatism coming—on again. Guess I'm—below the mark, Mr. Wheeler."

"I hope I'm as far below the mark as you are at your age, you darned old graybeard!" said Mr. Wheeler admiringly. "Below the mark! Huh!"

But Captain Ira did not hear him. Even as he dragged himself across the cabin to his room on the other side he was asleep. He flung himself clothes and all on his berth. Eighteen hours later he was wakened by the roaring voice of the port officer coming down the cabin skylight.

by Edwin M. Slocombe

THE BRANDING of OLIVER ★

"YOUR remarks may be as true as they sure are poetic, and I'm not disputin' but what with that Sunkist face of yours and them house-broken manners you're some experienced lady-killer; but what I says just now stands exactly as printed, and I repeats it for emphasis—There ain't no use whatever in pointin' your ears forrard and whinneyin' at that Norton filly."

The old homesteader washed down the trail of his observation with a gulp of liquid fire and turned upon the youthful puncher across the table a kindly, interrogative look.

The two men sat at a table beside an open window in the Midland barroom. The old homesteader was a tall, rangy plainsman, with a too-long neck upon which his wobbly head seemed insecurely attached. His yellow hair, yellow whiskers, blue eyes and fiery red cheeks betokened an abundance of both kinds of Scotch in his veins. And he was proud of both kinds. He wore a thistle in his hat and boasted that he did all his town shopping at the Midland bar.

Across the table sat a young puncher from the Triple Triangle outfit—a handsome, daring youth with olive skin, black, curly hair, insolent eyes and an irresistibly engaging manner.

"Whatever's the reason it ain't no use?" said the puncher in a drawling voice which was low and slow and full of pleasing tones. "Is she roped already?"

"Neither roped, thrown nor branded yet," replied the homesteader. "She's still runnin' wild among the sunflowers and the sage."

"Then," retorted the puncher, still speaking in a low, melodious voice, "I calls upon you to throw them original remarks into the discard instead of settin' them twice for emphasis. For, barrin' the skirts that's roped, which I leaves alone, I never sees the openwork waist yet which I don't crush when I yearns for such distractin' toil."

"Son," replied the homesteader, equally calm in voice and manner, "you arouses in me only pity; so instead of layin' you a wager, as I does if you was older, I lays my cards on the table and explains the meanin'

* *This is an Off-the-Trail Story. See first contents page.*

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of the spots and picters tharon. You has cinched the idea that you're a lady-killer, and you sure has some excuse, but no reason, for thinkin' the cinch will hold. Now where you leaves the trail, son, is precisely and exactly here—your experience heretofore has been limited to women that's bridlewise."

"My experience," interrupted the puncher, "runs across four of these yere States and is only halted for the moment at the Midland bar awaitin' the conclusion of your illuminatin' discourse."

"Unheedin' interruptions," continued the old homesteader, "I resumes my narrative. As I was sayin', your experience heretofore, and wherever, has been limited to women that's bridlewise. And the reason is because you picks out the good-lookers, which is precisely what every man ahead of you on the trail has been doin'.

"The ropin' of the good-lookers begins afore they've molted all their first teeth and continues uninterrupted. First-off they gets fed-up on smiles. Later they receives confection'ry and posies, and afore their minds has mastered the seven table they're gettin' kisses and lik'n' 'em. Their mouths is tender and responds to the lightest touch. If you lays the reins gently along their necks they understands the signal and responds accordin'. That's what I means a while back when I refers to all good-lookers as bridlewise.

"And now I concludes these remarks—which you don't overvalue none whatever in callin' 'em illuminatin'—by sayin' that just because you finds the good-lookers understandin' and easy, ain't no sort of reason for thinkin' you could manage a colt like that Norton filly, which ain't never yet felt the touch of hand or hemp."

"When you refers just now to cards," replied the puncher, "I sure has hopes that you refers to poker, but I sees by the pictures on the cards you lays down that you invites me serious to a game of Authors. Not having any time to waste on them long-haired poets when there's an unbranded filly runnin' around loose, I rises with regret and deprives myself a whole lot of your further discourse."

So saying, the puncher got to his feet, adjusted his belt and was about to go out without a parting look at his companion. The old homesteader, however, had risen quickly and the movement obliged the puncher to keep an eye on him. Even as they stood still for an instant there was a suggestion of energies in motion in their alert bodies and controlled faces.

The old homesteader was the first to speak.

"The regrets which you mentions so fluent, son, is pure an' undiluted ambrosia compared to the emulsion you forces me to feed into you," he remarked, looking steadily and hard into the eyes of the younger man. "And," he continued, "if you rambles with me out of the door yonder I discloses to you whyever."

The two men went out the door. The homesteader jerked his thumb toward the line of horses tied to the iron pipe-rail in front of the Midland Emporium.

"There's a lot of assorted animals yonder," he observed. "but there's only one hoss among 'em. I credits even you with knowing whichever I'm talking about. That hoss is mine. I wouldn't sell him for the best grub-stake in Kingdom Come, let alone for mere filthy lucre. But I'm bettin' that hoss, against the moth-eaten bronc you staggers in on, that you gets the flat of Margaret's hand against your Sunkist cheek if you attempts to close-in on her."

"This Margaret being whichever?" asked the puncher.

"This Margaret bein' obviously not the stallion, the natural deduction would be that she's the other party in our recent converse."

"Meaning the unroped filly?"

"Meanin'— That's her now!"

A PLAIN-FACED, wholesome-looking young woman, astride a yellow bronco, came cantering down the street. The old homesteader nodded to her and she threw up her arm in a playful salute.

"Sancho!" exclaimed the puncher. "She's as plain-lookin' as a persimmon, but she's got the build of a thoroughbred!"

"My wager bein'—" interrupted the homesteader.

But the puncher did not hear him. His whole attention was absorbed in watching the graceful ease and physical beauty of the young woman's riding.

"My wager bein'," repeated the homesteader, "that you corrals the same a week from tonight in the grove of cottonwoods alongside of Christmas Creek. There's an uprooted tree in the middle of the grove.

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I'm in ambush a whole lot behind the mound of roots and observes proceedings up to the pint where you attempts your first kiss. Tharupon you gets immejit what's a-comin' to you and I'm satisfied copious for havin' risked my hoss, bein' that interested in your eddication."

"And if she gives me her open lips instead of her closed fist?" asked the puncher.

"In that impossible contingency," said the homesteader, "I silently decamps, leavin' my hoss in place of your bronco which I rides home—onless I prefers to walk, bein' some pertikeler that-a-way as to the sort of beast I rides."

"Your gamble is took!" said the puncher, vaulting into his saddle. "And next Saturday night at fall of dark I takes your hoss also."

The old homesteader watched the young man out of sight, then slowly returned to the hotel to finish his shopping.

Oliver Williams, the puncher, sped westward on his bronco and was soon on the trail of Margaret Norton, the daughter, as he rightly deduced, of Reuel Norton, owner of Christmas Ranch. As to the nature of the overtures he would make when he overtook her, Oliver gave never a thought. Hitherto he had always left such details to the inspiration of the moment, and the inspiration had never failed. His attention was confined to the long stretch of level road ahead of him, and he was quick to observe a blotch on the side of the road some two miles distant where the road was crossed by an abandoned irrigation ditch.

As he rode nearer, the blotch became a dismounted rider, the dismounted rider a young woman in a khaki riding-habit, the young woman Margaret Norton, adjusting her saddle-blanket and tightening the cinch.

"Same old game," thought Oliver, "busy and waiting."

He drew up close to the dismounted girl and removed his hat with a curving sweep of his arm.

"I can be of some assistance, perhaps?" he ventured.

"None whatever, thank you," answered the girl without looking up.

Oliver watched her intently for a moment, but she fastened the cinch with a brisk tug and led her horse into the road without a glance at him.

"We appears to be riding in the same direction," said Oliver, his hat still in his hand.

But to this unnecessary remark Margaret made no reply. She stood motionless beside her horse, obviously waiting for him to ride on.

"I am looking for Christmas Ranch," continued Oliver unabashed, "I reckon you can show me the way, perhaps?"

The "perhaps" was spoken slowly and caressingly.

"The ranch-house is the first house you come to," replied Margaret.

This time she looked him squarely in the eyes, and although Oliver smiled his most engaging smile her eyes continued to rest upon his with a steady and imperative look.

Oliver thought of the homesteader's horse and with a polite, "Thank you, lady," lifted his reins upon his horse's neck and cantered toward Christmas Ranch.

What business he would conjure up when he came to the ranch, again he did not know. But this time he began to consider details in advance.

"Can sure ask if they sees some cattle strayed away from our outfit," he thought. "Reckon not," he continued. "They sure doesn't see 'em and I loses my ante. Some girl that! if she is a plain-looker. Rackon if she ever—Sancho! The big idea! A Morgan stallion for one week's work, and the everlasting ha-ha for old corn-whiskers!" The inspiration had arrived.

Coming to the ranch-house Oliver inquired for Mr. Norton, was directed to him and applied to him for a job.

"Got so much help now I'm plumb distracted," answered the rancher. "The only man needed on this ranch is a woman or a Chink."

"I savvy," replied Oliver, "and I takes the job."

"You'll find my daughter in the ranch-house or the cook-house. Tell her I've hired you."

Oliver turned away quickly to conceal his uncontrollable delight. Remounting, he rode to the ranch-house, threw the reins over his horse's head, sprang from the saddle and knocked at the door. The door was opened by Margaret.

Oliver removed his sombrero and bowed.

"If I has the honor of addressin' Miss Norton," he began, "I introduces myself as the new cook."

"Can you cook?" asked Margaret.

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"Anything that comes in a can," replied Oliver venturing his first smile.

"But can you make bread and doughnuts?"

"I reckon I can if I sees the trick turned once. One show-down is all I calls for."

"Then you've had no experience whatever as a cook?" asked Margaret.

"If you puts it that-a-way, I reckon I haven't; but the best cook whatever had to begin original without experience, I reckon."

Margaret almost smiled.

"I'll try you," she said, "but—" looking at his horse—"there's no need to keep your horse standing while you're working—though it may not be for long," she added.

SO IT was that Oliver Williams, who had herded cattle on the Argentine plains, in the hills of Arizona and on the prairie lands of southern Kansas, was hired as a cook on Christmas Ranch. The achievement of making bread and doughnuts, however, was not the most difficult task which he had set for himself at Christmas, for he had set out to win a caress from Margaret Norton.

Fortunately for his scheme, his past experience was of considerable service to him. And, despite the contemptible nature of the scheme into which he had been drawn by the homesteader's wager, Oliver was really a likable, well-meaning man—as men go. It therefore happened that his cautious, studied, but warm-hearted advances gradually penetrated Miss Margaret Norton's habitual reserve.

It was a week of hard campaigning which taxed Oliver's abundant ingenuity as no other experience of his adventurous life had done. He had, at times, the gift of insight into the feminine heart, and in this instance his perception was true. He knew that he must go slowly, and he did. He made no tactical or strategical mistake.

It was not until Saturday morning that he risked the crucial strategic maneuver. On that morning when he came into the cook-house he found Margaret already there.

"You're taking to the trail early today," he observed, noticing her habit.

"Yes," said Margaret. "You have become so skilful that I'm leaving breakfast entirely to you. I shall have breakfast on the trail."

"I wish I was cooking it for you—on the trail," said Oliver, with affected simplicity.

Margaret gave him a quick, searching look and then, catching something of the intensity beneath his respectful glance at her, her eyes fell and the touch of red in her sun-browned face deepened. Oliver turned away and began to light the wicks of the oil stove.

"No offense meant," said he, busy with the wicks.

"And none taken," replied Margaret. "Good-by, Mr. Chef; I'll be back in time to help with the dinner."

"Miss Norton," said Oliver, still busy with the lighting of the wicks, which he purposely fumbled, "I reckon it's only square to tell you, and mebbe, now that you're going away for so long, it's the best time to tell you."

He paused, observed the look of kindly attentiveness in Margaret's face and continued—still busy with the wicks—"I shan't be cooking heah much longer."

Margaret's face expressed the disappointment which Oliver hoped to see.

"Oh!" she said, with a falling inflection which was almost a sigh. And then, using words far from her feeling in order to conceal her feeling, she quickly added, "Then I shall have to get a new cook."

"And that's all you cares about my leaving, I reckon," said Oliver boldly. But as Margaret did not reply to this remark he continued, in a tone that was intended to seem like forced cheerfulness, "Must be that cooks is plentiful numerous around heah?"

"Oh, yes," said Margaret. "Cooks who can't cook and who have to be taught how to make bread are plentiful enough."

"I didn't come heah to learn cookin' nor nothing else," said Oliver, rising from the wicks and looking respectfully but directly into Margaret's eyes. "I came heah to teach."

"To teach what?" asked Margaret. In spite of herself the tone of her voice betrayed her deep feeling.

"To teach you to care for me," replied Oliver.

"Oh!" said Margaret quietly, "and you are leaving soon because the teaching is too hard?"

"No," said Oliver. "I'm leavin' because the learnin' is too hard. Fact is I'm plumb discouraged."

"But it took you a whole week to learn to cook just breakfast," said Margaret, "and I

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didn't get discouraged. Good-by, Mr. Chef, I'll bring some canned cooking from Midland City."

As she slipped out of the door she looked back and waved her hand to Oliver, which proceeding surprized them both. Throughout that morning Margaret thought continuously of Oliver, and Oliver thought continuously of the old homesteader's horse. When Margaret returned they both had decided what they would do in the event of certain contingencies. The contingencies happened as expected, but the results were unexpected.

Oliver played his hand cleverly. During the preparation of the dinner he assumed the manner of a respectful subordinate. Never once did he speak of anything except the business in hand—the business of preparing dinner for fifty hungry men. Not until dinner was over and Margaret was about to leave the cook-house did he venture a direct look into her eyes. What he saw there told him that he had a gambler's chance of winning. What he did not see was that he faced a gambler's peril.

"Miss Norton," said he, "it has been a powerful long day and I've done a powerful lot of thinking all day. I've decided to leave and I've decided not to leave. I reckon I'll soon be locoed complete unless we-all has a round-up right soon and you helps me to brand one or 'nother of these eloosive decisions."

"How can I help you?" asked Margaret, in her turn and for the first time in her life affecting ingenuousness.

"That's precisely and exactly what I wants to talk to you about," said Oliver.

"Why don't you, then?" asked Margaret.

"Not now. Not here," said Oliver. "Mebbe it's the apron, or mebbe it's the sight of that stack of unwashed pottery, but all I could ask you here is, 'Do I put an 'east cake in the omelet?' or, 'Do I slice the bread first and toast it after, or do I toast it first and slice it after?' "

Margaret smiled, and Oliver, encouraged, asked abruptly:

"Miss Norton, I was a gentleman afore I was a cook, and subsequent, too, I hopes. Will you ride with me after supper and take it kindly that I ask the favor?"

"Why, yes," said Margaret, "cooks are not really so plentiful as I made out, and if a talk with me about the work—or anything to do with it—will help you decide to stay—why, let us talk it over."

"Could you ride at sunset?" asked Oliver.

"Couldn't you finish your work sooner?" parried Margaret.

"Not much, if any," said Oliver, "and I'll have to change my clothes after that. Might as well take the dishes along as to ride in these heah white overalls. Reckon they was white this mawnin'," he added, purposely breaking the tension, "afore the obsequies of the late and lamented dinner got splotched all over 'em."

"Let's not have any obsequies," said Margaret, smiling. "I shall be at the cross-roads, fixing my saddle-blanket. If you get there at sunset, perhaps this time you can be of some assistance."

She smiled and left the cook-house without looking back.

IT WAS the hour of sunset in the valley of the Platte. But in the heart of Margaret Norton it was the hour of sunrise. In all her life of twenty-six years she had never received—and had never desired—a caress from a man. No man, except her father, had come closely into her life. Her father was a cold, undemonstrative man and he would have said that Margaret was a cold, undemonstrative woman.

From childhood until now she had lived in the open, a life of wholesome physical activity. She loved the sunlight, vast distances, storms, horses, riding, everything out-of-doors, nothing indoors, nothing subjective or sedentary or personally centered. She had never been interested in poetry or music or religion or human affections.

And now an all-pervading glow was illuminating her inner life. It was not the fierce, clear light of love. It was only the luminous glow of warm affection. But it was as prophetic of the coming of love as the dawn is prophetic of the rising sun.

A cowboy in a red-banded sombrero, khaki shirt and bear-skin chaps came riding furiously down the road and pulled up suddenly at her side.

"It's a long day that lasts forever," said Oliver, leaping to the ground and removing his hat with a flourish, "but I forgives it generous now it's deceased."

"We were to ride," said Margaret, "and there were to be no obsequies. Shall we go to Midland City and get some wicks for the stove? I forgot them this morning. We

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can do that and get home before dark."

Oliver quickly assented. The proposed ride would bring them home at nightfall—or, if they stopped at the grove of cottonwoods, darkness would overtake them there.

The two riders mounted and Margaret at once exclaimed—

"Race you to the creek!"

Oliver did not want to race. He would have preferred to ride slowly in order that they should not reach the grove too soon. Also, he knew that Margaret had the better horse. However, there was no alternative, so he signaled to his horse and they were off in quick pursuit of Margaret. But Oliver's wits were working faster than his bronco's legs, for it had suddenly occurred to him that Margaret might not be willing—as a bridlewise maid would be—to dismount at the grove upon their return.

His wits presently evolved an inspiration which so thoroughly absorbed his attention that he forgot everything else until he suddenly realized that he was nearing the creek and that Margaret, flushed of face and with shimmering eyes, was standing waiting for him to finish the race. It was the first time that Oliver had noticed Margaret's eyes, and he observed with surprize that they were impressively beautiful.

Leaning over in his saddle, he cut off the head of a huge sunflower and riding up to Margaret's side he presented it to her with a genuinely affectionate smile.

"This heah posey is the nearest resemblance to a crown of gold in these parts," said he, "and I presents it subdued and humble to the Queen of Hearts and Hosses."

"And I accepts it proud and joyful," said Margaret, imitating his speech, "on behalf of Frisco, and fastens it to his bridle."

The cottonwood grove was on the other side of the crossing, so that Oliver had to put his inspiration into execution at once. He therefore dug his spurs into his horse without first collecting him. The indignant bronco jumped and reared and cavorted into the grove. Oliver kept his seat and apparently nothing worthy of comment had happened.

Riding on to Midland City, Margaret bought the stove-wicks, which she tied to her saddle-bow, and the two riders turned toward home.

"I must have lost it back there by the crossing, I reckon," said Oliver as if talking to himself.

"Lost what?" asked Margaret.

"My pipe," replied Oliver. "Had it when I started. Must have fell out of my pocket when this fool-hoss tries to kick holes in the scenery alongside of the creek."

"Don't you want to get another pipe here?" asked Margaret. "I'll ride on slowly."

"There's pipes enough heah," said Oliver, "all the ways from Missoura meerschaums to silver-mounted briars, but a carload of 'em wouldn't stampede the value of the pipe I'm missin'."

"I didn't know," said Margaret, "that pipes were ever so valuable as that."

"They ain't, not regular. But this pipe saves my life once, when a stewed greaser pulls his gun on a pard he's gamblin' with. The bullet gouges the bowl of my pipe in its misguided flight and then caroms off into the wherever. Otherwise I departs this planet untimely. Which bein' the case I regards that pipe as valuable."

"Then we must find it," said Margaret. And although she emphazied the word "must," the important word to Oliver was "we."

"But it is getting dark already," observed Margaret. "We must ride fast or it will be quite dark when we get to the crossing."

"And if we rides fast," replied Oliver, "I loses something more valuable than my pipe."

"Why—what's that?" asked Margaret, letting her horse trot slowly.

"I reckon what I means is the talk we-all set out to have this evenin'."

"Oh!" said Margaret simply. "But we can talk while we're looking for the pipe."

"I couldn't," said Oliver. "I couldn't see the pipe if you was talkin' to me, not if I was lookin' right at it."

"Then you do the talking," said Margaret, "and I'll do the looking.—Race you to the creek!"

Down the road sped the horses, Frisco leading, until they came to the creek. Oliver enjoyed the race this time for he observed that the sky was overclouded and that it was getting dark rapidly.

"It's too bad," said Margaret; when he overtook her at the creek. "It is pitch-dark already. You'll have to come here in the morning."

"Reckon I'll just take a little look around first," said Oliver, dismounting. "I carries

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a flashlight special to hunt for lost pipes," he added laughing.

"Then I'll hunt, too," said Margaret. "It must be right here near the road."

"Ought to be," allowed Oliver. "If you don't mind I'll hitch the hosses yonder. My hoss is skittish of flashlights."

Having hitched the horses to a tree he returned and with the aid of the flashlight they examined the ground where the bronco had leaped into the grove.

When they had gone over this ground, Oliver straightened up and said:

"I better come in the mawnin' at sun-up, I reckon; but afore we gives up let's try a new trail. You see, I has my hand in my pocket a-holdin' my pipe when my hoss shies at the crown of gold. Must be I flings my hand out of my pocket and the pipe goes sky-rocketin' over yonder. I recalls now that I sees something move close to that fallen tree yonder."

"Can't you look there in the morning?" said Margaret.

"Sure can," said Oliver. "But it looks like it's goin' to rain tonight."

"And the rain would hurt the pipe?" asked Margaret.

"Ruin it complete," lied Oliver.

So, together, they walked toward the uprooted tree.

"Right about heah it was, I reckon," said Oliver, stealthily dropping his pipe and sweeping the ground with the flashlight.

"There it is!" cried Margaret. "Don't move or you'll step on it."

"And the battery's expired," lied Oliver, having shut off the light.

"Stand perfectly still," said Margaret, "and I'll get it. You are almost standing on it."

In the dark she knelt upon the ground and with swift, sensitive fingers ran her hands over the ground close to Oliver's feet.

"I have it!" she exclaimed, rising. "Here it is."

In the darkness their hands met and instinctively closed together over the pipe. Oliver's left arm slid gently around Margaret's shoulder.

"Miss Norton — Miss — Margaret!" he said, "I love you."

IN JUSTICE to Oliver it must be said that in that moment he did love Margaret as much as he had ever loved any one. It had not taken him long to discover that she was of an entirely different sort from any girl he had ever known, nor to appreciate that the sort was of a finer quality. And yet, even as he kissed Margaret, there centered across the foreground of his mind the image of a superb dappled stallion.

Margaret allowed Oliver to kiss her and to draw her body close to his. She made no reply to his declaration of love. She was silent and outwardly calm while her inner life underwent a strange, transforming readjustment. Then, suddenly, she threw her arms around Oliver and pressed her lips to his with fierce intensity.

That was a new experience for Oliver. Affected intensity he had known, and affected submission, but the intensity of the first and complete self-surrender of a mature and reserved young woman, he had never known. It was then that he suddenly realized that he faced a gambler's peril.

"I have decided to leave in the mawnin'," he said.

It was the tone in which he said it that caused Margaret to release herself from his arms.

"To leave Christmas Ranch?" she asked.

"Yes," said Oliver. "I couldn't stand it to be near you after this, I reckon—not as a cook."

That let them both out very nicely, Oliver thought. He had not suggested marriage. He could pose as the humble lover of the inaccessible, and, still affirming his love, he could ride away, out of her life, and she would soon forget him. He had no appreciation whatever of the refined sensibilities of the young woman of Margaret's sort, nor of the unlimited sacrifices she would willingly make in loyal devotion to an impoverished husband.

They walked in silence toward the horses.

"That is not your horse," said Margaret, recognizing the old homesteader's stallion before Oliver could so much as make out the shadowy forms of the horses.

"Reckon it is," said Oliver.

"Why—no. It's McPherson's Moonshine."

"It was," said Oliver. "I wins that hoss in a gamble recent. Old McWhiskers must 'ave happened along and left him."

They had come up to the horses. Oliver had unhitched Margaret's horse and stood patting his neck while waiting for Margaret to mount. Margaret put her foot into the stirrup and then quickly withdrew it.

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"This gamble—" she said. "Did it concern me?"

"I reckon it does," replied Oliver, "but I deplores that you picks up the trail so rapid. I'm thinking hard, a while back, how I lays the cards on the table most convenient, when you begins calling for a showdown."

Through Margaret's mind there flashed a series of pictures. It was a film which she had unreeled frequently during the past week. But now she ran it off at high speed and checked up the pictures from a new viewpoint.

The reel began with a picture of old McPherson and the strange puncher talking together outside the Midland Hotel as she rode by. It continued with the swift overtaking of her by the stranger and his immediate attempt to engage her in an easy-going, roadside comradeship. There followed the application for work at her father's ranch, and the puncher's welcome acceptance of the menial work of the cookhouse.

Of the week following there was only one picture, but it was a significant one. It was of Oliver on the occasion when he had confessed that he had a premeditated purpose in coming to Christmas Ranch.

"I did not come heah to learn cooking," he had said.

The reel ended with this after-sunset ride, which he had requested, and with a declaration of love which was satisfied with a few kisses and—and McPherson's horse!

"Oliver," said Margaret—it was the first time she had called him by his given name, and the tones of her voice were the tones of deep, conflicting emotions—"did you win that gamble just now in—in the grove?"

As she asked the question she came nearer to Oliver, stood close in front of him, and while he hesitated to reply she struck him in the face with her closed fist, as a man strikes.

"You brute!" she exclaimed. "I love you! And I hate you! Give me one minute—one minute for the love to die—and I will fight you as I would fight a wild beast!"

The compelling power of her swift courage and fierce passion surprized and fascinated Oliver. He had thought of her as an unemotional woman and now he suddenly realized that in her was a depth of emotional power which was simply overwhelming. He realized too, in a flash of understanding, that it was the bridle-wise maids of easy-going affections who were really unemotional—that they were as lacking in depth of emotion as they were lacking in emotional control. He was aware that it was for self-control that Margaret was now struggling. The intensity of her struggle aroused his own emotions to deepest intensity, and through the very awe in which he stood of her he adored her and desired her and loved her!

"Don't wait, Margaret!" he exclaimed, with earnestness as deep as her own. "Strike now! Strike hard! Don't wait for the love to die! I deserves the beating and I takes it manful; and I deserves the hate too, I reckon, but I takes that sorrowful."

"Oh-h! Oliver! How could you! How could you! Love you—now? I hate you! No. You do not deserve hate—you deserve contempt."

For a full minute thereafter they stood near each other in total silence. It was a terrible silence—terrible in the havoc it wrought in Margaret's heart and soul. But in that minute of silence, and at the cost of Margaret's suffering, Oliver, for the first time in his care-free, careless life, came face-to-face with one of life's invisible realities, and he grappled with it manfully. In that minute he became aware that there was something in life, terribly real, which was not real to him—that there was a chastity so pure and so jealously guarded that it could be violated by a kiss.

Margaret spoke first.

"I shall not thrash you, Oliver, though I am angry enough to do it. And I am stronger of body than you; I could do it. With the gun—I am the best shot in this section—I could kill you—and I might. Neither way is punishment enough for such cold-blooded cruelty! But it isn't that! Neither way would reach *you*. That is what decides me. The punishment must be something more than physical. And so I have decided—I have decided to marry you! Change the saddles! I will ride Moonshine. And remember, Oliver, I have a gun! I don't want to use it."

"You are going to—" exclaimed Oliver, amazed and uncomprehending.

But Margaret said nothing until the saddles were changed. Then, mounting the stallion, she said:

"We're going back to Midland City. Ride at my side!"

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"You are going to marry me?" asked Oliver incredulously.

"Yes, but I am not going to talk to you—not now. I've a lot of thinking to do before we reach the city."

The horses did not leap more quickly into a gallop than Margaret's mind leaped to its task. She was about to do an unprecedented thing—an unheard of thing. The decision to do it had been made in an instant—in an instant, too, when her whole being was in a tumult. But she had reasons for her decision. They also had come to her in a flash. Did they seem sound to her now when she was calm? Oh, yes, she was perfectly calm now. But what were those reasons?

It all began with that sudden realization—sudden and clear as an unexpected gunshot—that this man who had won her love was a trifler who played upon the affections of women for his own amusement. That, apparently, was his idea of what women were for! For that she held him in cold contempt. She knew that there were men who had that idea of women, but Oliver, even now that she knew the truth, did not seem of that sort. Very likely he had never known intimately a woman of wholesome interests or of wholesome affections.

For that she pitied him, and yet blamed him—for it was largely his own fault. But if only he could know such a woman, would he not respond to her finer qualities once he really appreciated them? If only she could awaken in him this appreciation!

Best of all if she could, at one blow, both awaken and punish him—make him realize that even she was infinitely more desirable than any of the women he had known, and, at the same time, make it perfectly clear to him why he could not have her—because he was not worthy of her. There was only one possible way of accomplishing this end. Oliver intended to leave her in the morning—he must not be allowed to go. There was only one way in which she could prevent him. It was the way she had decided upon.

THUS Margaret had reasoned—if reasoning it was—when she had made her swift decision to marry Oliver. And thus she reasoned now. But there were many details of procedure to be worked out, and to these she now turned her thoughts.

Side by side, in unbroken silence, they rode on through the darkness toward Midland City. Oliver welcomed the silence as much as Margaret. He, too, had a lot of thinking to do, and his thinking faculties were in a state of bewilderment. What was Margaret's idea in marrying him? And what could he, as a gentleman, do in this unique situation? Yes, he sure had a right smart of thinking to do before they reached the city.

By the time they had come to the first city lamp-post, Oliver thought he had discovered the way out.

"I don't think we-all can get married, Miss Margaret," he ventured, "not real proper married, not without a license which they doesn't hand out instantaneous."

"This isn't a 'real proper' wedding," replied Margaret. "It's about as much like my idea of a wedding as a funeral is. But that's my worry, and so is the license."

A few minutes later Margaret spoke again.

"We turn off here to the right. It's the second house."

Reaching the house indicated, they dismounted, knocked and were admitted by a lanky plainsman in a rusty frock coat.

"Good evening, Mr. Hawley," said Margaret.

"Good evening," responded the minister vaguely, running the fingers of one hand through his towsled white hair. "Come in. Come in. Oh! It's Miss Norton and—and——?"

"I reckon I don't cross your trail none afore now. My name's Williams."

As soon as the old minister had led them into the parlor, and before Maragret was seated, Oliver turned to the minister and said—

"We comes heah, pahson, to ask you to marry us."

Margaret gave Oliver a searching but uncomprehending look. He continued, with a winning smile:

"We deplores exceeding to come without a license, which procedure we savvys is a whole lot irregular, not to say informal. We therefore appeals to you on the grounds of mercy and good works, and stands awaitin' the clemency of the Gospel."

The old minister smiled kindly upon Oliver and replied—

"I am as eager to serve you young people as you are to be served." Then, turning to Margaret, he continued, "Do I understand, Miss Norton, that you want me to

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marry you, and without the required license?"

"Yes," answered Margaret. "I know it is an unusual request, but it is absolutely necessary or I would not ask it. I know, too, that in marrying us in this way you are liable to a fine. We should, of course, pay the fine if it were imposed. You will marry us, won't you?"

"But why not wait until a license can be secured?" asked the minister. "It is a matter of only a few days."

"Unfortunately that is not possible," said Margaret.

"I am sorry," said the minister, "but I cannot do what you ask unless you are more explicit."

Margaret arose and crossed the room to where the minister was standing.

"Mr. Hawley," she said, "I can not be more explicit. You must know that there are circumstances in which a woman's marriage becomes an urgent matter."

"Yes. Yes," said Mr. Hawley, a look of comprehension coming into his eyes.

"Well," said Margaret, "this is one of those circumstances—but it is not the one you are thinking of."

It was a cruel thrust, and it went home. The kindly old minister felt that he had done Margaret a grievous injury and he was eager to make what amends he could. He was too simple-minded to perceive that Margaret had set the trap which he had sprung. All that he perceived was that the occasion of his offense was his lack of trust in this young woman, whom he had regarded for many years as the most genuine and straightforward person of his acquaintance. He went to a drawer and brought Margaret and Oliver each a printed form.

"If you will kindly fill in these forms to the best of your ability, I will take upon myself whatever risk there is in the matter."

As Margaret had appreciated Oliver's courtesy when he asked the minister, himself, to marry them, so during the ceremony she deeply appreciated his thoughtful kindness when he took a plain gold ring from his hand and put it on her finger.

"It was my mother's," he said in a low voice.

From the minister's house Margaret took Oliver to the Emporium. As they were entering the doorway she said:

"Get whatever you need for a week's stay in a furnished camp. I will get the food supplies and a cooking-outfit for use on the trail. Those are the only things we shall have in common."

Oliver raised his hat without speaking and proceeded to shop industriously. Fortunately his needs were few and simple and obvious, and the element of choice a negligible matter, for his mind was entirely absorbed in thinking of Margaret. Never had he imagined the existence of a personality so extraordinary. Never before, in the presence of any one, had he felt a sure sense of his inferiority. And, struggling to break through this humbling awareness of Margaret's superiority, was a newly born ambition to master her. The word which he had once applied to her, kept recurring to him now—"thoroughbred."

"Yes, she sure is a thoroughbred," he thought, "as different from other girls as Moonshine is from a spavined bronc."

Seeing one of her father's punchers in the store, Margaret entrusted to him a note to her father hastily written on a large sheet of wrapping paper which she folded into a bulky little package and marked, "Please open at once."

When Oliver returned to the counter where Margaret was standing she pointed to two large bundles upon the counter.

"The food and cooking-utensils are evenly divided," she said, and she liked it that Oliver took only one of the bundles and did not offer to carry her share.

But she did not like it that she liked this or anything else about Oliver. Never for an instant did she forget the cruel and contemptible injury he had done her. Nor did she forget for an instant that the sole purpose of this mock-honeymoon was to punish him as no merely physical punishment could—to make him an object of ridicule wherever he should go and as long as he should live. She would cast him off when the mock-honeymoon had wrought his first punishment, and for the rest of his punishment—she would leave that to his cowboy world. Let them once discover that he had been physically overpowered by a woman and that, in sheer ridicule of him, she had compelled him to go with her on a mock-honeymoon, and his further punishment was assured. Wherever he went he would be greeted with guffaws. Men would nod meaningly to each other as he passed, or, if he talked with them there would be a twinkle in their eyes which would madden

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him. He would go through life—this handsome, insolent, engaging youth—as a branded man, and the brand would be of her burning.

"We are going to my Summer camp," she told Oliver when they were mounted again.

"Anywhere," replied Oliver graciously, and said no more.

So, together, they rode once more in silence, through Midland City and out into the silent prairie. Mile after mile they rode, occasionally at a canter, occasionally allowing the horses to walk, but riding most of the time at a slow trot. Mile after mile in silence, save for the squeaking of the saddles, the rustling of the sage-brush, the soft thudding of the horses' bare feet upon the soft earth, the occasional whinneying of the horses and the perpetual, far-away howls of the coyotes.

WHEN, toward morning, the moon broke through the clouds, Oliver made an appreciative exclamation; but Margaret said nothing. Looking at her covertly, in the moonlight, Oliver thought she looked fatigued. It occurred to him that she was in pain, that despite her outward calm and perfect poise she was suffering inwardly. And he was sorry. He knew that physically she was well able to stand the strain of an all-night ride. But for the remainder of the night he kept stealing glances at her in considerable anxiety for her powers of endurance.

Once she trembled as if she were chilled. Once he thought she was crying and he cursed himself for a brute. Twice she halted the horses and dismounted to rest the horses and adjust the saddles and the packs.

In the twilight of dawn they came in sight of a rambling, ramshackle group of ranch buildings.

"We'll have breakfast here beside that well," said Margaret, dismounting wearily. Tired though she was, she loosened the cinches on her own saddle and got the breakfast-supplies out of the pack. "You will have a full hour to yourself after breakfast," she added. "We leave promptly at sunrise."

"As you wish," said Oliver. "I'll be right back to get the breakfast."

And Margaret liked it that he made his replies brief and that he spoke kindly to her, that he neither made light of his situation nor acted aggrieved. Some men, in his place, would have played the part of jester or of martyr. Oliver accepted the situation in unaffected naturalness as if it were the most natural situation in the world.

Margaret began to wonder why he did this—why he had accepted her command of marriage without argument or attempted evasion—why he had been, throughout, so considerate of her, when he cared so little for her that he could subject her to the ignominy of a wagered kiss. He had hurt her to the core of her being. He had dealt her a blow which would affect her all her life—and yet he was treating her as one treats an injured loved one.

Was he acting a part now, as he had acted the part of a lover in order to win his wager? If so, what was his purpose? Was he affecting compliance with her plan in order to throw her off her guard and take some advantage of her? The thought hardened her heart. She hated and despised him. She could not bring herself to eat with him.

"Oliver," she said coldly, when he returned to the well, "you may get the breakfast ready and eat yours now. I shall rest first and eat later. And please don't wait your breakfast, I—I don't want to eat with you."

"Surely not," said Oliver, with a look of understanding sympathy, which Margaret observed, felt to be genuine and thereby was thrown again into a whirl-swirl of conflicting emotions.

And for this she blamed Oliver. Whatever he did, whether he intentionally injured her, or whether his intention was kind, he succeeded only and always in causing her pain. Thus reflecting, she walked to where her saddle-blanket was hanging, spread the blanket on the ground and lay down to rest.

Oliver prepared and ate his own breakfast, smoked his pipe, and then prepared a breakfast for Margaret, who presently rejoined him. By this time there were signs of an awakening household in the ranch-house, and Oliver went in to explain their presence in the yard. By sunrise they were again in the saddle.

"In three hours we should reach the camp," said Margaret as they started and as if speaking to no one in particular.

The truth was, she had had an hour's sleep and felt decidedly better for it, and she regretted already the mean motive

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which she had attached to Oliver's considerate acts.

In silence once more they rode on through a country of rolling hills and a steadily rising grade. It was a full three hours before Margaret turned off the road into an obliterated trail, by which they came presently to the foot of a little mountain. Climbing the steep mountain-trail, Oliver saw that the country to the southwest was mountainous.

"Colorado?" he asked.

"Yes," said Margaret and could not refrain from adding, "Beautiful, isn't it!"

Nearing the crest of the mountain, which was well wooded, they came to an open glade and at the far end of the glade to a cabin. Over the door of the cabin, in rambling girlish lettering, was the name

JOURNEY'S END.

Oliver took the horses and, without inquiring the way, led them to a rope-corral which he found in the woods at some distance from the cabin. There was a little shed beside the corral in which he hung the saddles and bridles. Then, picking up the packs, he returned to the cabin.

The windows had been opened and a fire was blazing in the living-room. Before the fire stood Margaret holding out her hands to the blaze. Fatigued as she was by the night's ride and the loss of sleep, and even more by the emotional strain of the past fourteen hours, Oliver observed the suggestion of reserved energy in her supple, upstanding body.

He had never realized before that the feminine figure could express physical strength as perfectly as it expresses physical beauty. But this realization was suddenly obliterated as his eyes caught a reflected gleam of the firelight on the ring which he had put on Margaret's hand. Then, for the first time, it occurred to him that this woman standing in the firelight was his wife.

Incongruously enough, the sensation which this thought awakened in him was the sensation of possession. His feeling was, perhaps, akin to that of a dog who has treed a strange, unknown animal of which he stands in awe. Or, perhaps, it was more closely akin to the uncoordinated emotions of a superstitious idolator who had somehow come into possession of an image of his god.

Something of Oliver's feeling must have expressed itself in his face, or in the posture of his body, for as Margaret turned to speak to him she gave him once more a searching, uncomprehending look. But this was followed immediately by a look of pain.

"If you will help me bring down my cot," she said, "I will sleep here by the fire. You will sleep in the room directly overhead."

"Thank you, Miss Margaret," said Oliver, and then wondered what had made him say "Miss."

Margaret also wondered and decided that it was not from mere habit. She knew intuitively that it was from the same niceness in taste which had led him to make the overtures to the minister and to put his mother's ring on her finger. This realization brought no subsequent shadow of pain to her face.

When her cot had been placed in front of the fire and the bedding laid upon it, Margaret took the revolver from her belt and put it on a chair beside her bed and, turning to Oliver with no other expression than weariness in the eyes which she lifted to his, she said simply—

"Good night, Oliver."

And Oliver, with dumb agony in his kind heart, could only say thickly—

"Good night."

As he reached the top stair he heard the turning of a key in the door at the foot of the stairs.

"Trusts me 'bout as much as I trusts an unskinned mule," he reflected, "and I don't blame her none whatever."

So it came to pass that Oliver Williams of the joyous heart and the care-free spirit, went to bed for the first time in his mature years in a mood of self-contempt and of tender pity for a woman.

WHEN he awoke he heard Margaret moving about down-stairs. He dressed quickly and went down. The door was unlocked and ajar. Opening it he saw Margaret bending over the cook-stove at the kitchen-end of the living-room.

"There's a wooden trough in an open shed just below the spring," she said, "which we use for bathing. It's up the hill from the corral. Get a towel from your room. And take this pail, please, and fill it with drinking-water at the spring. And if you'll feed the horses on your way back,

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dinner will be ready before you get here."

"Thank you, Miss Margaret," said Oliver, and for the life of him he couldn't think of anything more to say, though he wanted to say something sensible and cheerful.

When he returned, invigorated by the cool bath, he appeared to be—and was—in his habitual mood of cheerfulness.

"Miss Margaret," he said as he seated himself in the chair which she had placed for him opposite her own, "I reckon I overestimates none whatever the opinion you holds of me, the same being so low-down it makes a mule-skinning greaser feel he's disfiured beyond recognition by the coroner. I gathers that precisely what you thinks of me ain't fit to feed to a starvin' buzzard. I don't aim to hurt you again by speakin' ever again about pussonal matters, but I clutches this occasion desperate to say to you that your opinion of me reads like an embossed eulogy on the tombstone of royalty, compared to what I thinks of myself. And speaking of royalty—this coffee's better than any king ever sips from his favorite diamond-studded dipper."

"Coffee is always better in camp," said Margaret, ignoring the personal allusion, and appreciating the opportunity to do so which Oliver had considerately made for her.

But was it considerateness? Was it not cleverness? Pondering this question, Margaret ate her dinner in a self-absorption which Oliver covertly studied but could not analyze.

During the week at Journey's End, Oliver and Margaret were in the saddle a part of every day, taking long rides into the mountains. Living as they did in the flat, prairie country, they were exhilarated, in spite of themselves by the mountain views and the mountain air.

One evening, returning home at sunset, they came upon a crest of table-land from which they had a view of a full-circling horizon. The majestic vastness of the view, and the gorgeous sunset coloring of the whole horizon, were overpowering. Margaret made no attempt to repress the cry of delight which escaped from her lips. Nor could she refrain from looking back at Oliver to make sure that he was sharing her delight.

Oliver's horse was standing on the rocky ledge greedily eating the leaves of a scrub-oak—a thing Oliver would not have allowed had he been aware of it. But it was evident to Margaret that Oliver was unaware of the existence of his horse and even of his human companion. He had taken off his sombrero, and was sitting with far-seeing eyes looking into the massed beauty of the sunset sky. Upon his face was a look which Margaret had seen only once before—on the morning of their arrival at Journey's End, when he entered the cabin and saw her standing in the firelight with her arms stretched out toward the fire.

A prick of pain in her heart caused Margaret to gasp and, gathering in her reins, she started down the descending trail with tears dropping from her cheeks. "Oh! Oliver! If only—" was as much as she would allow herself to think in words.

At the first bend in the trail she dismounted and under pretext of straightening her saddle-blanket waited for Oliver. When presently he rode around the bend she looked searchingly into his face and quickly remounted.

Hurried as her glance at Oliver was, it served her purpose fully. Womanlike, she had been making a study of the expressions in Oliver's eyes and in the tones of his voice. The latter, she had discovered, were largely under his control, the former not at all. What she wanted to observe at this time was the expression which came into his eyes when he awoke from the subjective vision of the table-rock to the realization of the actual circumstances of his present situation. What she saw in Oliver's eyes could not be misunderstood. It was what she expected to see after the sight of him on the table-rock, but whether it was what she desired to see, she was not sure.

Of two things, however, she was absolutely sure. One, that her desire to punish Oliver severely was more easily accomplished than she had anticipated. The other, the surprizing fact which she had not in the least anticipated, that she was to share the pain of his punishment.

On the following day—the fifth of their honeymoon—as they were rising from dinner, Margaret said:

"I am going to ride into the mountains this afternoon and have a camp-fire supper. Would you like to go, or would you prefer to do something by yourself?"

It was the first time she had given Oliver the choice of not accompanying her. It

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was the first time she had spoken to him in a light-hearted manner.

"Myself is the worst company I meets recent," said Oliver. "And I accepts thankful, for myself and hoss."

"Be ready in an hour," said Margaret with something of her former restraint in tone and look.

An hour later Oliver brought Moonshine and Frisco to the door and assisted Margaret in tying the picnic supplies to the saddles. In happier spirits than either of them had known for nearly a week they turned their horses toward the mountains. At the foot of their own mountain they came upon a wide woods-road and Oliver attempted to bring Frisco abreast of Moonshine.

Moonshine, however, would have none of it. He was fretful and ill-humored. He laid his ears back and cantered with his head slightly turned in order to keep one eye upon the bronco. Whenever Frisco's head came abreast of his flank, he champed at his bit, swished his tail angrily and misbehaved so badly that for Margaret's sake Oliver gave it up. Margaret, however, thought that Moonshine needed to be disciplined, so she held him in with a tight curb and asked Oliver to pass them and ride in the lead. This was a mistake which Margaret would not have made if she had not been fretful herself. Moonshine had never followed another horse and he had no intention of doing so now. The bronco was aware of this, became fretful also and bucked repeatedly. Both horses were soon in a state of high nervous tension and the riders were having anything but the happy ride which both had anticipated.

Thus inauspiciously they began the ascent of Table-Top Mountain. After an hour's ride Margaret decided that Moonshine would quiet down if the bronco were far enough ahead, so she called to Oliver to ride on ahead and she would fall behind. But Moonshine liked this arrangement no better than the other and showed it. He wanted to pass the bronco and he fretted under the restraining curb.

The hard riding and her own annoyance were tiring Margaret, and when she came to a level stretch in the mountain road she decided to overtake Oliver and allow Moonshine to lead. At the moment that she slackened the curb-rein she heard a sharp, metallic rattle. Moonshine clamped his teeth on the bits and bolted. A shower of small stones rattled down the rocky wall and fell into the road close behind them.

Moonshine was running wildly. At the end of the level stretch ahead the road narrowed into a flinty bridle-path, which curved around the outer edge of a high wall of rock, directly above a thickly wooded ravine. If Moonshine took this path at the speed he was going he would certainly plunge over the curving shelf of rock into the ravine immediately below. Margaret perceived this peril and withdrew her feet from the stirrups, clinging to Moonshine with the leg-grip of a bareback rider.

TO THE left of the bridle-path, and forking it, there was a dry water-course. Margaret, seeing that this water-course was her one hope of escape, drew the reins sharply across Moonshine's neck and dug hard into his flank with her left heel. But Moonshine had a dread of wetting his feet, and had his suspicions of even a dry water-course.

Oliver had heard the rattle of the falling stones and, listening intently, he heard the quick staccato thuds of Moonshine's feet. Turning Frisco around, he sped backward over the trail and crossed the shelving ledge at a perilous speed. Moonshine was tearing toward him only a hundred feet away. In a flash Oliver recalled the water-course which ran into the bridle-path not five yards distant. At this point he halted Frisco, thus blocking the entrance to the bridle-path, and awaited the oncoming of Moonshine. The stallion was upon them with a rush. He saw that the road he had chosen was blocked by the despised bronco. He uttered a shrill scream of rage and in doing so released the bits. He leaped into the water-course, but in passing Frisco his rump smote the bronco a glancing blow which bowled him over and flung Oliver somersaulting into the air.

The water-course was poor going and Margaret soon had Moonshine under control. Then she dismounted, patted his neck and muzzle, made sure that his feet were all right and, remounting, walked him slowly down the water-course.

Margaret had realized the peril of Oliver's position and she knew that he had realized it, for she had observed him free his feet from the stirrups as Moonshine came near. He might have stood a foot back from the position he had taken, but the ledge was two

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feet wider there and Moonshine might have attempted to leap through between Frisco and the wall. Or Oliver might have backed Frisco just in time to avoid the impact with Moonshine, but Margaret knew, and Oliver knew, that the surest barrier to a runaway horse is a stationary barrier. Had Frisco moved, Moonshine would probably have flung himself against the moving barrier in the expectation of somehow getting through it.

Eagerly, and yet with fear for what she might see, Margaret came to the bridle-path and tied Moonshine to a stunted larch. Frisco was not in sight, but some fifty feet below her, lying on his back at the foot of a spruce tree, was Oliver.

Apparently he had been watching for Margaret, for as soon as her face appeared over the edge of the ledge, he waved his hand to her and called—"I'm coming up directly."

"Are you badly hurt?" called back Margaret.

"Nothing to mention," replied Oliver, but he continued to lie motionless.

"Nothing broken?" asked Margaret.

"Why, yes," said Oliver, "I've broken——"

Margaret did not hear what it was that Oliver had broken. It sounded like "legs," but it couldn't be his legs for he had just said that he was "coming up directly." Probably he had said "leg." Margaret did not wait to ask him again what he had broken. It was enough to see him lying so still upon his back.

"Don't move!" she called. "I'm coming down."

With nimble feet she sped down the steep slope. The precarious footing required her whole attention. She was therefore surprized, when she stopped a few yards from the spruce tree, to see Oliver slowly rising to his feet.

"What did you break?" she gasped.

"Break?" repeated Oliver.

"Yes. You said you had broken——"

"Oh!" said Oliver, gripping his waist with both hands and making a painful effort to control his expression, "I said I had broken the picnic eggs."

The sudden relaxing of the tension by these ludicrous words sent Margaret into a gale of laughter, which she made no effort to control until she saw Oliver's bewildered look.

"I thought you said 'legs,' " she explained.

And then they both laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks.

"But you are hurt," said Margaret. "I saw you wince a moment ago."

"Nothing to mention, as I insists a while back," replied Oliver. "When I meteorizes through space just now, I collides with this Christmas tree and hangs thereon suspended like a rubber doll with its whistle squeezed. Then I drops to the ground collapsed and waits patient for the whistle to fill up again with ozone as of yore."

Margaret smiled and Oliver, drawing in a deep breath emitted a long, squeaking whistle.

"There! I'm all unsqueezed now, I reckon," he said, and then added, seriously, "But how does you manage with Moonshine, Miss Margaret?"

So they climbed back to the road and, seeing that Oliver was really uninjured, Margaret suggested that they should walk on until they came to a brook and have the picnic supper as they had planned. But first they went back over the homeward road until they came to soft ground in which they found the prints of Frisco's feet and made sure that the bronco was uninjured by his fall.

IT WAS a happy picnic supper in a Paradise spot to which they had been attracted by the sound of falling water. A tiny stream spouted out from a riven ledge and fell with tinkling sounds into a rocky basin at the foot of a giant spruce. Margaret and Oliver, both, were gladdened by the break which had come in the long-sustained tension of their relations with each other. Both accepted it eagerly without allowing themselves to consider how long it would last, or what would take its place when it was gone. It was enough for them both that for this hour they were somehow able to speak to each other with perfect naturalness, and to laugh together light-heartedly over most trivial matters. It was like the joyful naturalness of being well again after one has had a long and serious illness.

It was not until the supper was over and the camp-fire extinguished, that either of them had any misgivings as to what lay ahead of them. Margaret was standing by the fire when Oliver brought the water to put it out. As the water slushed upon the fire and smothered the flames, leaving the

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black and steaming embers, Margaret shivered. The extinguished flame had recalled that other flame which Oliver had extinguished.

With a girlish impulse she held out her hand.

"Don't throw on any more," she said. "Wait! Wait and see if it starts up again."

Standing side by side they watched the charred embers. The steam gradually disappeared. The black embers slowly dried. The sun set unobserved. And still Margaret and Oliver stood side by side in silence waiting to see if the fire would break out again. Although no word was spoken the silence was charged with meaning and with mutual understanding. A wavering wisp of smoke curled up out of the pile of embers. But at that most inauspicious moment the pail dropped from Oliver's hand and the water drenched the smoldering embers.

With a gasp of pain, which she tried to repress, Margaret turned away and was hurrying toward the road when she heard a heavy thud. Glancing back over her shoulder she saw Oliver's body lying across the fire.

She was at his side in an instant, saw that he was unconscious, rolled his body away from the fire and unbuttoned his coat to listen to his heart. But when she opened his coat she saw that his shirt was torn and sopping with blood. The afterglow of the sunset was rapidly fading. Margaret ran to the pool and filled the pail. Tearing open the torn shirt she found the wound—a deep gash in his side where the broken end of a dead branch had punctured the flesh.

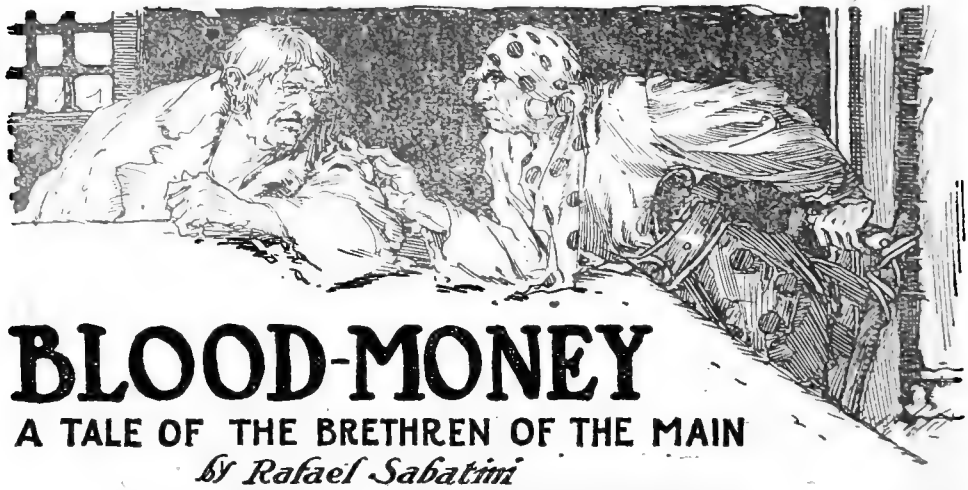
Rinsing out a coffee-cup, she poured cold water into the gash and was relieved to see that the flow of blood was not great. It was, she found, nothing worse than a bad flesh-wound, though it had bled profusely for lack of care. The cold spring-water retarded the bleeding, and before Margaret had finished dressing the wound, Oliver recovered consciousness. She saw his eyes open and she laid a cold, wet cloth upon his forehead.

"I'm sorry I makes you this trouble," he said. "I'm all right now, I reckon."

"Oliver," said Margaret, "why didn't you tell me you were hurt?"

"Because, if I tells you, it spoils the only happy day you has recent," said Oliver. "And I craves to see you smile."

Tears that burned her cheeks—tears of her forgiving love—fell from Margaret's eyes. Kneeling close to Oliver, she laid her lips upon his and sobbed, while her tears, branding-hot, fell burning upon his face.



BLOOD-MONEY

A TALE OF THE BRETHREN OF THE MAIN

by Rafael Sabatini

Author of "Maracaybo," "The Governor's Daughter," etc.

CAPTAIN PETER BLOOD was pleased with the world; which is but another way of saying that he was pleased with himself.

He stood on the mole at Cayona and surveyed the shipping in that port designed by very nature for a stronghold. Enclosed on either side by mountainous walls of rock, and the mouth of that miniature gulf—only to be approached by two channels, demanding skilful pilotage—commanded by the massive fort with which

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man had supplemented nature, the French and English buccaneers who made it their lair might thence deride the might of the King of Spain.

Captain Blood considered with pride the five great ships that now made up his fleet, every spar and timber of which had once been the property of Spain. His own flagship, the *Colleen* of forty guns—that once had been the *Cinco Llagas*—with her red bulwarks and gilded ports was touched into a lovely thing of flame by the setting sun. Beside her rode the *Elizabeth* and, beyond, the smaller three twenty-gun vessels lately captured in the affair at Maracaybo. These ships, originally named the *Infanta*, the *San Felipe* and the *Santo Niño*, Blood had renamed the *Clotho*, the *Lachesis*, and the *Atropos*, meaning thereby playfully to convey that they were the arbiters of the fate of any Spaniard henceforth encountered by them upon the seas.

Captain Blood smiled in appreciation of his own delicate, scholarly humor. He was, as has been said, well pleased with himself. His following numbered close upon a thousand men, and he could double that number when he pleased. For his luck was passing into a proverb, and luck is the highest quality that can be demanded in a leader of hazardous enterprises. Not the great Morgan himself in his best days had wielded such authority and power. Not even Montbar—surnamed by Spaniards the Exterminator—had been more dreaded by Spain than Don Pedro Sangre, as they translated his name, accounting it most apt.

Order, he knew, was being taken against him. Not only the King of Spain, of whose power he had made a mock, but also the King of England—whom he accounted, and with some reason, a contemptible fellow—were concerting measures for his destruction, and news had lately come to Tortuga that, nearer at hand, the Spanish Admiral Don Miguel de Espinosa, who had been the latest and most terrible sufferer at his hands, had proclaimed that he would pay ten thousand pieces of eight to any man who should deliver up to him the person of Captain Blood, alive. Don Miguel's was a vindictiveness that was not to be satisfied by mere death.

Peter Blood was not intimidated, nor on that account was he likely to mistrust his luck so much as to let himself run to rust in the security of Tortuga. For that which he had suffered—and he had suffered much—at the hands of man, he had chosen to make Spain the scapegoat. Thus he accounted that he served a twofold purpose. He took compensation and at the same time served, not indeed the Stuart King, whom he despised—although himself born an Irishman and bred a Papist—but England, and for that matter all the rest of civilized mankind, which cruel, treacherous, greedy, bigoted Castile sought to debar from intercourse with the New World.

He turned from the mole, almost deserted by now of its usual crowd of bustling traders of many nations—English, French and Dutch—of planters and of seamen of various degrees, of buccaneers who were *boucan*-hunters and buccaneers who were frankly pirates, of Indians, fruit-selling half-castes, negro slaves and all the other types of the human family that throughout the day converted the quays of Cayona into an image of Babel.

As he turned away, the voice of Hayton, the boatswain of the *Colleen*, called after him from the boat that had brought him ashore—

"Back at eight bells, captain?"

"At eight bells," said Blood over his shoulder, and sauntered on, swinging his long ebony cane, an elegant courtly figure in gray and silver that in nothing suggested the ruthless buccaneer.

HE TOOK his way up toward the town, saluted as he went by most of those whom he met and stared at by the rest. He chose to go by way of the wide, unpaved rue du Roi de France, which the townsfolk had sought to embellish by flanking it with rows of palm-trees.

As he approached the tavern of "The King of France" the little crowd about its portals drew themselves to attention. From within came a steady drone of voices, as a muffled accompaniment to foul exclamations, snatches of coarse songs and the shrill, foolish laughter of women. Through all ran the rattle of dice and the clinking of drinking-cans.

Blood realized that his buccaneers were making merry with the gold they had brought from Maracaybo. The ruffians overflowing from that house of infamy hailed him with a ringing cheer. Was he not king of all the ruffians that made up the great Brotherhood of the Main?

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The captain acknowledged their greeting by raising his cane, and passed on. He had business with M. de La Place, the Governor of Tortuga, and that business took him now to the handsome stone house crowning the eminence to the east of the town. The captain was a provident man, and he was providing against the day when the death or downfall of King James might make it possible for him to return home. It was his practise to make over the bulk of his share of prizes to the governor against bills of exchange on France, which he forwarded to Paris for collection and deposit.

Because these transactions were profitable to M. de La Place, and still more because of a signal service that the captain had once done him and his, Peter Blood was a welcome visitor at the governor's house. And this not only with the governor himself, but with the son and daughter who composed his family.

This evening, his business being transacted, Mademoiselle de La Place elected to escort Captain Blood down the short avenue of her father's fragrant garden. A pale-faced, black-haired beauty, tall and statuesque of figure and richly gowned in the last mode of France, Mademoiselle de La Place was as romantic of appearance as of temperament. And as she stepped gracefully beside the captain in the gathering dusk she showed her purpose to be not without a certain romantic quality also.

"*Monsieur*," she said, and continued in French, hesitating a little, "I have come to implore you to be ever on your guard. You have too many enemies."

He halted and, half-turning, hat in hand, he bowed until his long black ringlets almost met across his clear-cut, gipsy-tinted face.

"*Mademoiselle*, your concern is flattering—but so flattering." Erect again, his bold eyes, so startlingly light under their black brows and in a face so burnt and swarthy, laughed into her own. "I do not want for enemies, true. It is the penalty of greatness. But at least they are not in Tortuga."

"Are you so very sure of that?"

He frowned and considered an instant before slowly answering her:

"*Mademoiselle*, you speak as if from some knowledge."

"Hardly so much. My knowledge is but the knowledge of what a slave told me today. He says that the Spanish admiral had placed a price upon your head."

"That is just the Spanish admiral's notion of flattery, *mademoiselle*."

"And that Cahusac has been heard to say that he will make you rue the wrong you did him at Maracaybo."

"That was indiscreet of Cahusac. Besides, all the world knows he was not wronged. He was allowed to depart in safety as he wished when he thought the situation grown too dangerous."

"But by so doing he sacrificed his share of the prizes, and for that he and his companions have since been the mock of Tortuga. Can you not conceive what must be that ruffian's feelings?"

They had reached the gate.

"You will take precautions? You will guard yourself?" she begged him.

"Since it is your gracious wish, and so that I may live on to serve you," he gallantly consented, and with formal gallantry bowed low to kiss her hand.

Seriously concerned, however, by her warning he was not. That Cahusac should be vindictive, he could well believe. But that Cahusac should utter threats here in Tortuga was an indiscretion too dangerous to be credible in the case of a cur who took no risks.

He stepped out briskly through the night that was closing down, soft and warm, and came soon within sight of the lights of the rue du Roi de France. As he reached the head of that now deserted thoroughfare a shadow detached itself from the mouth of a lane on his right to intercept him.

Even as he checked, prepared to fall on guard, he made out the figure to be a woman's and heard his name called softly in a woman's voice.

"Captain Blood!" And now she addressed him quickly, breathlessly, "I saw you pass two hours ago. But I durstn't be seen speaking to you in daylight here in the street. So I have been on the watch for your return. Don't go on, captain. You are walking into danger, walking to your death."

At last his puzzled mind recognized her. And before the eyes of his memory flashed a scene enacted a week ago at "The King of France." Two drunken ruffians had quarreled over a woman—part of the human wreckage of Europe washed up on the shores of the New World—an unfortunate creature of a certain comeliness, which, however,

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like the cast-off finery she wore, was tarnished, soiled and crumpled. The woman, arrogating a voice in a dispute of which she was the object, was brutally struck by one of her companions, and Blood, upon an impulse of chivalrous anger, had felled her assailant and escorted her from the place.

"They're lying in wait for you down yonder," she was saying, "and they mean to kill you."

"Who does?" he asked her, Mademoiselle de La Place's words of warning sharply recalled.

"A score of them there are, and if they was to know—if they was to see me here a-warning you—my own throat would be cut before morning."

She peered fearfully about her through the gloom, as she spoke, and fear quivered in her voice. Then she cried out huskily as if with mounting terror.

"O, don't let us stand here! Come with me. I'll make you safe until daylight. Then you can go back to your ship, and if you're wise you'll stay on board after this or else come ashore in company. Come!" she ended, and caught him by the sleeve.

"Whisht now! Whisht!" said he, resisting the pressure on his arm. "Whither will you be taking me?"

"O, what odds, so long as I make you safe?" She was dragging at him with all her weight. "You was kind to me and I can't leave you to be killed. And we'll both be murdered unless you come."

Yielding at last, he allowed her to lead him from the wide street into the by-way from which she had issued to intercept him. It was a narrow lane with little one-storied houses that were mostly timber standing at wide intervals along one side of it. Along the other ran a palisade enclosing a plantation.

At the second house she stopped. The little door stood open and the interior was dimly lighted by the naked flame of a brass oil-lamp standing upon a table.

"Go in," she bade him in a shuddering whisper.

TWO steps led down to the floor of the house, which was below the level of the street. Down these went Captain Blood and on into the room, whose air was rank with the reek of stale tobacco and the sickly odor of the little oil lamp. The woman followed and closed the door; and then, before Captain Blood could turn to inspect his surroundings in that dim light, he was struck over the head from behind by something heavy and hard-driven, which if it did not stun him outright at least stretched him sick and faint upon the grimy, naked boards of the floor.

At the same moment a woman's scream, that ended abruptly in a stifled gurgle, cut sharply upon the silence.

In an instant, before Captain Blood could move to help himself, before he could even recover from his bewildered surprize, swift, nervous, skilful hands had done their work upon him. Thongs of hide lashed his ankles, and his arms, which had been dragged behind him. Then he was rolled over on to his back, lifted, forced into a chair and lashed by the waist to that.

A man of low stature and powerful, ape-like build, long in the body and short in the legs, was leaning over him. The sleeves of his blue shirt were rolled to the elbow of his prodigious, long, muscular and hairy arms. Little black eyes twinkled wickedly in a broad face that was almost as flat and sallow as a mulatto's. A red and blue scarf swathed his head, completely concealing his hair; heavy gold rings hung in the lobes of his great ears.

Captain Blood considered him for a long moment, setting a curb upon the violent rage that arose in him in a measure as his senses cleared. Instinctively he realized that violence and passion would help him not at all and that at all costs they must be suppressed. And he suppressed them.

"Cahusac!" he said slowly. And then added, "This is an unexpected pleasure entirely!"

"Ye've dropped anchor at last, captain," said Cahusac, and he laughed softly with infinite malice.

Blood looked beyond him toward the door, where the woman was writhing in the grasp of Cahusac's companion.

"Will you be quiet, you slut, or must I quiet you?" the fellow was growling menacingly.

"What are you going to do to him, Sam?" she whimpered.

"That's no business of yours, my girl."

"Oh, yes, it is. You told me he was in danger and I believed you, you lying tyke!"

"Well—so he was. But he's safe and snug now. You go in there, Molly," he

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commanded, and pointed across the room to the black entrance of an alcove.

"I'll not—" she was beginning angrily.

"Go on!" he snarled, "or it'll be the worse for you."

He seized her roughly again and thrust her, still resisting, across the room and into the alcove. He closed the door and bolted it.

"Stay you there and keep quiet, or I'll quiet you once for all."

From beyond the door he was answered by a moan. Then there was the creak of a bed as the woman flung herself violently upon it, and thereafter silence.

Captain Blood accounted her part in this business explained and more or less ended. He looked up into the face of his sometime associate and his lips smiled to simulate a calm he was far from feeling.

"Would it be an impertinence to inquire what ye're intending, Cahusac?" said he.

Cahusac's companion laughed and lounged across to the table, a tall, loose-limbed fellow with a long face of an almost Indian cast. His dress implied a hunter. He answered for Cahusac, who glowered, morosely silent.

"We intend to hand you over to Don Miguel de Espinosa."

He stooped to give his attention to the lamp, pulling up the wick and trimming it, so that the light in the shabby little room was suddenly increased.

"*C'est ça!*" said Cahusac. "And Don Miguel, no doubt, he'll intend to hang you from the yard-arm."

"So Don Miguel's in this, is he? Glory be! I suppose it's the blood-money that's tempted ye. Sure now, it's the very work ye're fitted for, devil a doubt. But have ye considered all? There are reefs ahead, my lad. Hayton was to have met me with a boat at the mole at eight bells. I'm late as it is. Eight bells was made an hour ago and more. Presently they'll take alarm. They knew where I was going. They'll follow and track me. To find me, the boys will be turning Tortuga inside out like a sack.

"And what'll happen to ye then, Cahusac? Have you thought of that? The pity of you is that ye're entirely without foresight. It was lack of foresight that sent you away empty-handed from Maracaybo. And even then, but for me, you'd be hauling at the oar of a Spanish galley this minute. Yet ye're aggrieved, being a poor-spirited, cross-grained cur, and to vent your spite you're running straight upon destruction. If ye've a spark of sense you'll haul in sail, my lad, and heave to before it's too late."

Cahusac leered at him for only answer, and then in silence went through the captain's pockets. The other, meanwhile, sat down on a three-legged stool of pine.

"What's o'clock, Cahusac?" he asked.

Cahusac consulted the captain's watch.

"Near half-past nine, Sam."

"Plague on it!" grumbled Sam. "Three hours to wait!"

"There's dice in the cupboard," said Cahusac, "and here's something to be played for."

He jerked his thumb toward the yield of Captain Blood's pockets, which made a little pile upon the table. There were some twenty gold pieces, a little silver, an onion-shaped gold watch, a gold tobacco-box, a pistol and lastly a jewel which Cahusac had detached from the lace at the captain's throat. To these he now added the Captain's sword and rich baldric of gray leather heavily wrought in gold.

SAM rose, went to a cupboard, and fetched thence the dice. He set them on the table, and drawing up his stool, again resumed his seat. The money he divided into two equal halves. Then he added the sword and the watch to one pile and the jewel, the pistol and the tobacco-box to the other.

Blood, very alert and watchful—so concentrated indeed upon the problem of winning free from this trap that he was hardly conscious of the pain in his head from the blow that had felled him—began to speak again. Resolutely he refused to admit the fear and hopelessness that were knocking at his heart.

"There's another thing ye've not considered," said he slowly, almost drawling. "And that is that I might be willing to ransom myself at a far more handsome price than the Spanish admiral has offered for me."

Cahusac laughed.

"*Tiens!* And your certainty that Hayton will come to your rescue, then? What of that?"

He laughed again, and Sam laughed with him.

"It's probable," said Blood. "Most probable. But not certain—nothing is, in

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this uncertain world. Not even that the Spaniard will pay you the ten thousand pieces of eight they tell me he has been after offering. You could make a better bargain with me, Cahusac."

He paused, and his keen, watchful glance observed the sudden gleam of covetousness in the Frenchman's eye, as well as the frown contracting the brow of the other ruffian.

"You might make such a bargain as would compensate you for what you missed at Maracaybo. For every thousand pieces that the Spaniard offers, sure now I'll offer you two."

Cahusac's jaw fell; his eyes widened.

"Twenty thousand pieces!" he gasped in blank amazement.

And then Sam's great ham of a fist crashed down upon the rickety table, and he swore foully and fiercely.

"None of that!" he roared. "I've made my bargain and I abides by it. It'll be the worse for me if I doesn't—aye, and for you, Cahusac. Besides, are you such a gull that you think this pretty pimp'll keep faith with you?"

"He knows that I would. He's sailed with me," said Blood. "He knows that my word is accounted good even by Spaniards."

"Maybe. But it's not accounted good by me." Sam stood over him, the long evil face with its sloping brows and heavy eyebrows grown dark and menacing. "I'm pledged to deliver you safely at midnight, and when I pledges myself to a job I does it. Understand?"

Captain Blood looked up at him, and actually smiled.

"Perfectly," said he. "You leave nothing to the imagination."

And he meant it literally, for what he had clearly gathered was that it was Sam who had entered into league with the Spanish agents and that he dared not for his life's sake break faith with them.

"Then that's as well," Sam answered him. "If you wants to be spared the discomfort of a gag for the next three hours, you'll just hold your plaguey tongue. Understand that?"

He thrust his long face forward into his captive's, sneering and menacing.

Understanding, Captain Blood abandoned his desperate clutch of the only slender straw of hope that he had discovered in the situation. He realized that he was to wait here helpless in his bonds until the time appointed for delivery to some one who should carry him off to Don Miguel de Espinosa. Upon what would happen to him then he scarcely dared to dwell. He knew the revolting cruelties of which a Spaniard was capable and he could guess what a spur of rage would be the Spanish admiral's.

A sweat of horror broke upon his skin. Was he indeed to end his gloriously hazardous career in this mean way? Was he who had so proudly sailed the seas of the Main as a conqueror to founder thus in a dirty backwater? He could found no hope upon the search that Hayton and the others would presently be making.

That, as he had said, they would turn the place inside out, he never doubted. But he never doubted either that they would come too late. They might hunt down his betrayers, and wreak a terrible vengeance upon them. But how should that avail him?

THE fogs of passion thickened in his mind; despair smothered the power of thought. He had close upon a thousand devoted men here in Tortuga almost within hail; and he bound and helpless, and so to be delivered to the vindictive justice of Castile! That insistent, ever-recurring thought beat backward and forward like a pendulum in his brain, distracting it.

And then, in a sense, he came to himself again. His mind grew clear once more, preternaturally clear and active. Cahusac he knew for a venal scoundrel who would keep faith with none if he saw profit in treachery. And the other was probably no better; indeed probably worse, since interest alone—the Spanish blood-money—had lured him to his present task. He concluded that he had too soon abandoned the attempt to outbid the Spanish admiral. That way he might yet throw a bone of contention to these mangy curs, over which they would perhaps end by tearing at each other's throats.

A moment he surveyed them now, observing the evil greed in the eyes of each as they watched the fall of the dice over their trifling stakes from the gold and trinkets of which they had rifled him, and over which they were gaming to beguile the time of waiting.

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And then he heard his own crisp voice breaking the silence.

"You gamble there for halfpence with a fortune within your reach."

"Are you beginning again?" growled Sam.

But the captain went on undaunted.

"I'll outbid the Spanish admiral's blood-money by forty thousand pieces. I offer you fifty thousand pieces of eight for my life."

Sam, who had risen in anger, stood suddenly arrested by the mention of so vast a sum.

Cahusac had risen too, and now both men stood, one on each side of the table, tense with an excitement which, if unexpressed as yet, was none the less to be read in the sudden pallor of their faces and dilation of their eyes. At last the Frenchman broke the silence.

"*Dieu de Dieu!* Fifty thousand pieces of eight!" He uttered the words slowly, as if to impress the figure upon his own and his companion's mind. And he repeated: "Fifty thousand pieces of eight! Twenty-five thousand for each! *Pardi*, but that is worth some risk. Eh, Sam?"

"A mort of money, true," said Sam thoughtfully. And then he recovered. "Bah! What's a promise anyhow? Who's to trust him? Once he's free, who's to make him pay, and he's——"

"Oh, I pay," said Blood. "Cahusac will tell you that I always pay." And he continued, "Consider that such a sum even when divided will make each of you wealthy, to lead a life of ease and plenty. *Mucho viño, muchas mugeres!*" he laughed in Spanish. "To be sure now you'll be wise."

"It could be done," said Cahusac, persuasively, to his companion. "It's not yet ten, and between this and midnight we could put ourselves beyond the reach of your Spanish friends."

But Sam was not to be persuaded. He had been thinking and, tempting as he must find the lure, he discerned a double peril within it. Committed now to this venture, he dared neither draw back nor shift his course. Between the certain rage of the Spaniards did he play them false, and the probable resentment of Blood once he was restored to liberty, Sam saw himself inevitably crushed. Better an assured five thousand pieces to be enjoyed in comparative safety than a possible twenty-five thousand accompanied by such risks.

"It could not be done at all," he cried angrily. "So let us hear no more about it. I've warned you once already."

"*Mordieu!*" cried Cahusac thickly. "But I say it could! And I say it's worth the risk."

"You says so, do you? And where's the risk you run? The Spaniards do not even know that you're in this business. It's easy for you to talk of risks that you won't be called upon to run. But it's not quite the same for me. If I fails the don, he'll want to know the reason. And anyhow I've pledged myself, and I'm a man of my word. So let's hear no more about it."

He towered there fierce and determined, and Cahusac, after a scowling stare into that long, resolute face, uttered a sigh of exasperation and sat down again.

Blood perceived quite clearly the inward rage that consumed the Frenchman. Vindictive though he might be toward the captain, the venal scoundrel preferred his enemy's gold to his blood, and it was easy to guess the bitterness in which he saw himself compelled to forego the more tangible satisfaction simply because of the risks with which acceptance would be fraught for his associate.

For a spell there was no word spoken between the twain, nor did Blood judge that he could further serve his ends by adding anything to what he had already said. He took heart meanwhile from the clear perception of the mischief he had already made.

When at last he broke the brooding silence, his words seemed to have no bearing whatever upon the situation.

"Though ye may mean to sell me to Spain, sure that's no reason why ye should let me die of thirst! I've a throat that's like the salt ponds on Saltatudos, so I have."

Although he had a definite purpose to serve, to which he made his thirst a pretext, yet that thirst itself was real, and it was suffered by his captors in common with himself. The air of that room, whose door and window were tight-barred, was stifling. Sam passed a hand across his dank brow and swept away the moisture.

"——, the heat!" he muttered. "And now I thirst, myself."

Cahusac licked his dry lips.

"Is there nothing in the house?" he asked.

"No. But it's only a step to the 'King

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of France.'" He rose. "I'll go fetch a jack of wine."

Hope soared wildly in the breast of Captain Blood. It was precisely for this that he had played. Knowing their drinking habit and how easily suggestion must arouse the desire to indulge it, he had hoped to send one of them upon that errand, and that the one to go would be Sam. With Cahusac he was sure that he could make a deal at once.

And then Cahusac, the fool, ruined all by his excessive eagerness. He, too, was on his feet.

"A jack of wine! Yes, yes!" he cried. "Make haste. I, too, am thirsty."

Almost was there a quiver in his voice. Sam's ears detected it. He stood arrested, pondering his associate and reading in his face the rascal's treacherous intent.

He smiled a little.

"On second thoughts," said he slowly, "it will be best if you goes and I stays on guard."

Cahusac's mouth fell open; almost he turned pale. Inwardly Captain Blood cursed him for a triple fool.

"D'ye mean that ye don't trust me?" he demanded.

"It ain't that—not exactly," he was answered. "But it's me that stays."

"*Ah, ça!*" cried Cahusac angrily. "If you don't trust me with him, I don't trust you neither."

"You don't need to. You know that I dursn't be tempted by his promises. That's why I'm the one to stay."

Cahusac considered him silently, then shrugged and turned aside. At least he realized that what Sam said was true. A moment he pondered, his eyes narrowing.

"*Ah, bah!*" I go," he muttered, and abruptly went.

As the door closed on the departing Frenchman Sam resumed his seat at the table. Blood listened to the quickly receding footsteps, until they had faded in the distance; then he broke the silence with a laugh that startled his companion.

Sam looked up sharply.

"What's amusing you now, captain?"

Blood would have preferred to deal with Cahusac. Cahusac was a certainty. Sam was hardly a possibility, obsessed as he obviously was by the fear of Spain. Still that possibility must be exploited, however slender it might appear.

"Your rashness, bedad!" answered Captain Blood. "Ye'll not trust him to remain on guard, yet ye trust him out of your sight."

"And what harm can he do?"

"He might not return alone," said the Captain darkly.

"Blister me!" cried Sam. "If he tries any such tricks I'll pistol him at sight. That's how I serves them that gets tricky with me."

"Ye'd be wise to serve him so in any case. He's a treacherous tyke, Sam, as I should know. Ye've baffled him tonight, and he's not the man to forgive. Ye should know that, from his betrayal of me. But ye don't know. Ye've eyes, Sam, but no more sight than a blind puppy; and a head, Sam, but no more brains than are contained in a melon, or you'd never hesitate at all between Spain and me."

"Oh, it's that, is it?"

"Just that—just fifty thousand pieces of eight that I offer, and that I pledge my honor to pay you, as well as pledging my honor to bear no malice and seek no vengeance. Even Cahusac assures you that my word is good and was ready enough to accept it."

He paused. The rascally hunter was considering him silently, his face clay-colored and the perspiration standing in beads upon his brow. Presently he spoke hoarsely.

"Fifty thousand pieces, you said," quoth he softly.

"To be sure. For where's the need to share with that French cur? D'ye dream he'd share with you if he could make it all his own by slipping a knife into your back? Come, Sam, make a bold bid for fortune. —— your fears of Spain! Spain's a fantom, I'll protect you from Spain. You can lie safe aboard my flagship."

Again the scoundrel considered.

"Fifty thousand! Ah, but the risk!"

"Sure there's no risk at all," said Blood. "Not half the risk you run when it comes out that you sold me to Spain, as come out it will. Man, ye'll never leave Tortuga alive. And if ye did, my buccaneers would hunt you to the ends of the earth."

"But who's to tell?"

"There's always some one. Ye were a fool to undertake this job. A bigger fool to have taken Cahusac for your partner. He'll be the first man suspected, for he's

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talked openly of vengeance. And when they get him, as get him they will, it's as sure as Judgment that he'll give you away."

"By ——! I believe you in that," cried Sam, presented with facts that he had not considered.

"And in the rest as well, Sam," said Captain Blood persuasively.

"Wait! Let me think!"

As once before, Captain Blood judged wisely that he had said enough for the moment. So far his success with Sam had been greater than he had dared to hope.

THE minutes sped, and Sam, elbows on the table and head in his hands, sat still and thoughtful. When at last he sat back and the yellow light beat once more upon his face, Blood saw that it was white and gleaming. He tried to conjecture how far the poison he had dropped into Sam's mind might have done its work. Presently Sam plucked a pistol from his belt and examined the priming. That was significant. But it was more significant still that he did not replace the pistol in his belt. He sat nursing it, his yellowish face grimly set, his coarse lips tight with purpose.

"Sam," said Captain Blood softly. "What have you decided?"

"I'll put it out of the power of that French mongrel to bubble me," said the ruffian.

"And nothing else?"

"The rest can wait."

Again Captain Blood bridled his eagerness to force the pace.

Followed an apparently interminable time of waiting, in a silence broken only by the ticking of the captain's watch where it lay upon the table. Then faintly at first, but swiftly growing louder as they drew nearer, came a patter of steps in the lane outside. The door was pushed open and Cahusac appeared carrying a great black jack.

Sam was already on his feet beyond the table, his right hand behind him.

"You've been a long time gone," he grumbled. "What kept you?"

Cahusac was pale and breathing rather hard, as if he had been running. Blood, whose mind was preternaturally alert, knowing that he had not run, looked elsewhere for a reason, and guessed it to lie in either fear or excitement.

"I made all haste," was the Frenchman's answer. "But I was athirst myself and I stayed to quench it. Here's your wine."

He set the leather jack on the table.

And on the instant, almost at point-blank range, Sam shot him through the temple.

Through the rising cloud of smoke, whose acrid smell took him sharply in the throat and set him coughing, Blood saw a picture that he was to retain in his mind to the end of his days. Face downward on the floor lay Cahusac, with twitching limbs, while Sam leaned forward across the table to watch him, a grin on his long, animal face.

"I takes no risks with French swine like you," he explained himself as if his victim could still hear him.

Then he put down the pistol and reached for the jack. He raised it to his mouth and poured a full draught down his parched throat. Noisily he smacked his lips, as he set down the vessel.

Then, as a bitter after-taste caught him in the throat, he made a grimace, and apprehension charged suddenly through his mind and spread upon his countenance. He snatched up the jack again and thrust his nose into it, sniffing audibly, like a questing dog. Then with eyes dilating in horror he stared at Blood out of a countenance that was leaden-hued, and in an awful voice spoke a single word—

"*Manzanilla!*"

Then he swung round and, uttering horrible, blood-curdling blasphemies, he hurled the jack and the remainder of its poisoned contents at the dead man on the floor.

A moment later he was doubled up by pain and his hands were clawing and clutching at his stomach. Then he mastered himself, and without any thought now for Blood or anything but the torment at work upon his vitals, he reeled across the room and pulled the door wide. The effort seemed to increase his agony. Again he was taken by a cramp that doubled him until his chest was upon his knees and he howled the while, blaspheming at first, but presently uttering mere inarticulate animal noises. He collapsed upon the floor, a raving, writhing maniac.

Captain Blood considered him grimly, amazed but no whit intrigued.

Here was no riddle. Never had poetic retribution more fitly and promptly overtaken a pair of villains. Cahusac had loaded the wine with the poison of the

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manchineel apple, so readily procurable on Tortuga. With this, and so that he might be free to make a bargain with Captain Blood and secure to himself the whole of the ransom the captain offered, he had murdered his associate in the very moment in which with the same intent his associate had murdered him.

If Captain Blood had his own wits to thank for much, he had his luck to thank for more.

Gradually and slowly, as it seemed to the captive spectator, though in reality very quickly, the poisoned man's struggles grew fainter. Presently they were merely, and ever decreasingly, sporadic, and finally they ceased altogether, as did his breathing, which at the last had grown stertorous. He lay quite still in a cramped huddle against the open door.

By then Captain Blood was giving his attention to himself, and he had already wasted some moments and some strength in ineffectual straining at his bonds. A drumming on the door of the alcove reminded him of the presence there of the woman who had been used unconsciously to decoy him.

"Break down the door," he called to her. "There's no one left here but myself."

Fortunately that door was but a feeble screen of slender planks, and it yielded quickly to the shoulder that she set against it. Wild-eyed and disheveled, she broke at last into the room, then checked and screamed at what she beheld there.

Captain Blood spoke sharply, to steady her.

"Now don't be screeching for nothing, my dear. They're both as dead as the planks of the floor, and dead men never harmed any one. There's a knife yonder. Just be slipping it through these plaguey thongs."

In an instant he was free and on his feet, shaking out his ruffled plumage. Then he recovered his sword, his pistol, his watch and his tobacco-box. The gold and the jewel he pushed together into a little heap upon the table.

"Ye'll have a home somewhere in the world, no doubt. This will help you back to it, my girl."

She began to weep. He took up his hat, picked up his ebony cane from the floor, bade her good-night and stepped out into the lane.

Ten minutes later, he walked into an excited, torch-lit mob of buccaneers upon the mole, whom Hagthorpe and Wolverstone were organizing into search-parties to scour the town. Wolverstone's single eye fiercely conned the captain.

"Where the devil have you been?" he asked.

"Observing the luck that goes with blood-money," said Captain Blood.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THE following protest seems to me an empty one, but if there's really any offense to our "gob" comrades in the phrase in question we want to know it and will try to keep it out of our pages. At present it looks to me like an awful lot of fuss over nothing. Here's the correspondence. I haven't anything to say about it. Those of you who follow or have followed the sea can decide.

U. S. S. New York.
Honolulu, T. H.
September 16, 1920.

While reading the September issue of *Adventure* this morning, I noticed, in "The Fourth Boy," by Charles Brown, Jr., the following sentence:

"Captain Logan, who was standing in white pajamas on deck at the head of the diminutive gangplank which clung to the lip of Papeete's moonlit beach *like a drunken sailor whose shore leave has expired*, was a patient man and mild-mannered."

I AM sure the writer of the article in which the above was found intended no offense to the men who wear the uniform. Nevertheless he should have found a better way to express himself. Sailors are not, as quite a few people seem to suppose, a crowd of drunkards. The days of such sailors passed with the beginning of the war—if not before.

We are human and have feelings and pride. If we can not read magazines without having slurs printed in the stories we will quit buying those books and get others.

SEVERAL weeks ago I noticed a remark by Major-General Leonard Wood in which he said the "American nation was spending money like a drunken sailor." I wrote to the General and he apologized. I wrote to Senator Harding about a similar expression, and he too begged my pardon. Only yesterday I called the attention of a local newspaper editor to the fact that an article in his paper had caused much indignation to the gobs. Every one seems glad enough to repent for their error, but what I want is not a confession but a more careful set of orators and authors who will speak and write nothing for which they should ask forgiveness.

Please be so kind as to send my letter to Mr. Charles Brown, Jr. I am anxious for him to know how ignorant I consider his remark. I want him to exercise greater care in choosing his phrases of expression in the future. Ordinarily I am not a "grouch," but I can not permit such "slams and insinuations" to pass unchallenged.

Thanking you for the favor which I am sure you will do for me, I am—EVERETT MILSTEAD.

October 11, 1920.

MY DEAR MR. MILSTEAD:

This magazine and I personally are strong for sailors. Have many friends among them. As you

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probably know, a number of our writers are sailors or ex-sailors.

WHAT sailors I know like plain talk and plain dealings, so I'm going to hand them to you. To be perfectly frank, I think you are borrowing a —— of a lot of trouble and doing more harm to sailors than are the people you complain to and about. The phrase "a drunken sailor" is one of the oldest in the language and is used, as many other figures of speech are used, without any particular thought and with no idea of slurring the people mentioned. Sailors, like most other people, get soused and there probably was a time in the past when they were particularly noted for it. I don't believe they are now but the old phrase has lived on.

Don't get any idea in your head that because I don't see things your way I have anything but the highest regard for sailors. If you like, I'll publish your letter in Camp-Fire, but if I do I reserve the right to express myself as frankly as I have to you. Mr. Charles Brown, Jr. is in the South Sea Islands. I'll send your letter to him as you request, keeping a copy of it in case you want me to use it in Camp-Fire.

Honestly man, sit down and think it over and see whether you haven't borrowed a lot of trouble.

With best wishes, Very truly yours,
EDITOR.

Everett Milstead, Esq.,
U. S. New York,
via San Francisco, California.

U. S. S. Monterey,
Pearl Harbor, T. H.
November 2, 1920.

Accept my thanks for forwarding my letter to Mr. Brown.

I indeed enjoyed your letter, because of its frankness; and now comes the answer:

YOU are quite correct in saying that some of the sailors—men-o'-warsmen—get intoxicated. It is only natural that in every walk of life there will be found some persons whose thinking faculty fails to function properly. Do you, honestly, believe that drinking excessively becomes any man? The phrase of which I complained is a traditional one. People do not hold to the doings of long ago; they change; so why should authors, editors and composers adhere to words which offend the more respectful element of even the Navy?

In proportion to the number of men-o'-warsmen in the Navy today there are but few who indulge in excessive use of intoxicants. The writer believes: "The strongest of men are those who confess their own weakness." Getting "soused," as you termed it, is a sure sign of mental deficiency. Our Navy has a great majority of abstainers.

WITH regard to "digging up a —— of a lot of trouble" for myself: The writer does not consider the execution of his duty as being trouble. If the civil population had the slightest idea of the difference between a sailor and a man-o'-warsman—the latter being a seagoing man of the Navy; the former of the Merchant Marine—they would urgently request their editors to make some distinction between the two classes.

For several years, the writer has been arguing with men who view the naval personnel as a conglomeration of incorrigibles. Not once has he failed to get good results. Why? Because he isn't averse to tenacity.

I thank you very much for your fatherly advice. It was indeed kind of you to give it, but—my objections to traditional phrases shall continue. If I had read in your magazine, something boosting the sea-going profession, be assured that you and the author would have received a letter of thanks.

Sea-going men are an essential of every great nation, but if editors and authors are going to continue to use phrases which offend, it will be no easy task to persuade men to sail.

Earnestly requesting more of your advice and suggestions—EVERETT MILSTEAD.

November 22, 1920.

MY DEAR MR. MILSTEAD:

I think the best I can do for you is to publish your letter in Camp-Fire with my own views on the case and leave our readers to judge.

With best wishes, Very truly yours,
EDITOR.

Everett Milstead, Esq.,
U. S. S. Monterey,
Pearl Harbor, T. H.

SINCE the above was sent to the printer the following letter was received. It was signed only in typewriting. I'll venture there are more than one Camp-Fire comrade among the crew of the *Maddox* and I'd particularly like to hear from them as to whether this practically anonymous letter really speaks for the entire crew.

I want to know what the rest of you think about this matter. Here's the letter:

U. S. S. Maddox,
Charleston, S. C.
April, 26, 1921.

DEAR SIR:

In your Mid-May's issue of your *Adventure* Magazine, some author (E. S. Pladwell) used the expression as "Drunken Sailors" in describing some district which happens to fit in the story titled as "A Pot of Gold." This quotation is something which we can not let pass unnoticed. The expression has been frequently used in the past by writers and public speakers to emphasize their English. It has been said that a man does not use profane language if he has a good command of the English language, and the above quotation is unnecessary and is an injustice to one hundred and twenty thousand men in the Navy. The expression, "Drunken Sailors," used in any form is a slur to every man in the American Navy and is not only an injustice to them, but to their families and relatives.

Of course people who are familar with the Navy know that the expression probably reflects on sailors of tramp steamers and merchant ships, but there are so many people who are not informed what class of men go to sea as sailors; it is high time that the expression "Drunken Sailors" was abolished.

It not only casts reflection on the service, but it gives people the wrong impression about men in the Navy. The men who are the backbone of the

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American Navy today are native born Americans as near perfect physically, mentally and morally as any organization on earth and are as clean a body of men as you will find anywhere.

This expression has been inadvertently used long enough and the men who are in the Navy, and the men who have been honorably discharged from the service, resent it and are due an apology from the author who used the expression.

Thanking you for your cooperation, yours for the Navy. THE CREW.

c/o Postmaster, Charleston, S. C.

SOMETHING from G. A. Wells in connection with his story in this issue:

New Albany, Indiana.

As for smothering a fire in wheat I have seen that done in a grain elevator and I see no reason why the same method will not apply in the case of a ship.

IN 1897 and thereabouts Captain Joshua Slocum, an old man, sailed his sloop *Spray* forty-seven thousand miles around the world. He was gone almost three years. At no time while on the high sea was there another man aboard with him. The most remarkable part of it was that in all that distance he calculated that he was at the wheel of his vessel not more than five thousand miles. The rest of the time she steered herself with lashed wheel.

On one occasion he sailed for twenty-three days a distance of twenty-seven hundred miles from Thursday Island to the Cocos group, and spent only three hours at the wheel, that time including his working the sloop into her anchorage at Keeling harbor.

As proof that he always sailed alone he challenged the captains of other ships met at sea to come aboard and search him. The challenge was often accepted and his sloop searched with minute care, but no other man was ever found aboard her. There was not even a cat. Captain Slocum sailed absolutely alone.

I cite this most remarkable voyage that any man ever went on by way of explaining that a ship will steer herself with the wheel lashed. A fore-and-after will steer in beckets more readily than a square-rigger, and a propeller ship won't steer without a man at the wheel at all. I was told in Gloucester that it is common in fair weather and a steady wind for the fishermen to steer themselves with lashed wheels. —G. A. WELLS.

IT'S taken quite a while to pass on to you our collection of dynamite letters. You'll remember one or two of you hopped on to Talbot Mundy for making dynamite explode when thrown in one of his stories and he offered an autographed copy of one of his books and a subscription to our magazine to the comrade who would furnish him the best alibi. Though I didn't consider him in any way bound to give this "reward" to more than one, I imagine quite a few of you have received from him the autographed book. After the first man, Dean C. Taylor, had got the full "reward" I drew the line against more subscriptions to the magazine. His letter was in the first April issue.

There are more and longer letters than we can well get space for in "Camp-Fire" but I'll do the best I can, giving as much of as many as space permits and drawing at random from the pile. When you've read them I think you'll agree that Mr. Mundy has his alibi.

Columbus, Ohio.

Twenty years at the game—have handled the stuff in ton lots—and nothing wrong with my memory.

I've noticed many dad-blistered fool things said (and written) about dynamite, simply because those talking had either no knowledge, or only incomplete knowledge of the subject.

I THINK I can put my finger directly upon the point which causes so much controversy—so much apparent diversity of experience. I should have said "points," for there are at least two: the fact that commercial dynamite varies widely in its percentage of contained nitro-glycerin—also, that temperature plays a principal part in its explosion.

The average layman does not know that dynamite is put on the market according to its ratio of nitro-glycerin to the bulk of its carrier—which may be sawdust or a special clay. It is on sale as twenty per cent.—used for blowing stumps, etc.; forty per cent.—the ordinary "giant-powder" of prospectors, miners in general; sixty per cent. and eighty per cent.—these last having especial uses in rock that is hard to break, such as the basalt, trachyte, rhyolite, etc.

In the first place, "giant-powder"—the common forty per cent. grade, must be *detonated* (explosion is caused by a shock plus fire, such as is afforded by the ordinary fulminating caps), while pure nitro-glycerin is, chemically speaking, very unstable; it explodes from a, more or less, heavy jar. It is obvious then that any dynamite requires a greater shock to cause explosion, the less percentage of pure nitro-glycerin it contains—eighty per cent. requires very little shock; twenty per cent, not only needs more but in addition needs a spark as well.

THE above data must be modified to admit the point of temperature. In the manufacture of nitro-glycerin the utmost care is observed to keep the temperature below a certain danger point, or it will "let go." Nitro-glycerin "freezes" at a high temperature (Fahrenheit), and is more difficult to explode when frozen. Thawed sticks explode normally, the chemical action being complete, and miners always thaw dynamite in order to obtain the highest efficiency.

Now, since dynamite is a mechanical (not chemical) combination of nitro-glycerin with a carrier, saw-dust or clay, and the nitro is a liquid when thawed, you can see that when exposed to heat the nitro must flow more or less through the mass of the carrier and become deposited on the paper sheath about the "stick." This is the "blistering" mentioned by Dean C. Taylor.

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"OLD" dynamite, then, is highly dangerous, because it has alternately thawed and frozen until a layer of nitro, from ninety per cent. to one hundred per cent. pure, is deposited on its under side, *and* pure nitro explodes by shock alone, and by the simple application of heat, above a certain degree. This is obviated, where dynamite is stored, by turning the sticks, or boxes which contain it, every so often.

You can readily see, now, why some dynamite can, and will, explode by being dropped, or if something should hit it; it is no doubt "old" powder, or of the sixty per cent. or eighty per cent. grade. It is not "freakish" in any way, but follows perfectly rigid chemical laws.

NOW for some examples, personally observed, of its apparent freak action: I have seen a man take a piece of forty per cent. as big as the head of a pin, lay it on an anvil, and explode it by hitting with an eight-pound sledge with nothing to fear; I have been underground when our powder-warmer caught fire (it was placed near the portal of the tunnel) and we dodged past holding our breaths, not to breathe the poisonous vapor. The stuff burned to ashes, *but* if it had sustained the slightest *jar*—! Therefore we stepped softly, and lost no time. I have seen a man light the fire in his cook-stove with a chunk whittled from a forty per cent. stick (he quit the practise, when I discovered it); I always use my knife to cut a stick through, when needing less than a whole one to load a hole. It is quite safe.

I have seen a fifty-pound box of forty per cent. fall five hundred feet from a steep hill trail into a rocky gulch, when it became loosened from a burro-pack, and when I recovered the stuff it was usable, though the box was smashed to kindling wood; the powder was frozen, and *fresh.*

AGAIN, one day I was packing the stuff from the railroad to a mine up the mountain on a horse, four fifty-pound boxes, or two hundred pounds, to the load. The cayuse was snaky and caught sight of the corner of a box. He pitched as though you'd put a cold saddle on him on a frosty morning—pitched those boxes of dynamite off, and smashed and ground them to splinters. He stamped some of the powder into the ground, and made hash of it all—and that horse was *shod!* This was also new, fresh, frozen dynamite.

I also helped move some "old" powder from a storage shack and dump it in the river, a distance of about a mile. That was D-A-N-G-E-R-O-U-S! We did it by contract, at a stiff price, too. Even old miners didn't care to touch it; it could not be moved by wagon safely, but the railroad ran fairly near the storage cabin and skirted the river; so we placed a mattress on a hand-car and gently transported each fifty-pound box by hand to the mattress, rolled that car to the river in fear and trembling, and slid the wicked, yellow sticks quietly into the river. Not a hot day, but our underclothes were damp with sweat.

TO SUM up: It all depends on the kind of dynamite and upon its condition, whether it may or may not explode when dropped. If Mr. Mundy's dynamite was old, thawed powder of say sixty per cent., or even forty per cent., it would probably explode if dropped a couple of hundred feet on rock. You can generally expode dynamite by shooting into it with a rifle, or six-gun, though I've known it to be obstinate even there, *because* it was not the right temperature. I've even picked up whole sticks of dynamite in a tunnel after shooting a round of holes—powder that was *blown out of the hole!* Also, I've had a hole miss-fire, and found the XXXXX cap had blown the top from the upper stick without turning the trick. These latter cases were all of new powder which had not been thawed.

This letter is fairly long, but perhaps it may show just *why* dynamite acts in such *apparently* different ways.

I WILL add that I should like to consider myself enrolled in the "Camp-fire" crowd; they're a good bunch of pals and perhaps I might have something of interest for the monthly smoke-talks, from time to time. By way of introduction:

My vocation is mining—am manager of a mine in San Juan County, Colorado—and my avocation is fiction-writing, at which I've had more or less success although your magazine has yet to hear from me.

My own spirit of adventure has taken me to many queer places—Alaska, Greenland, Colorado Rockies, Oregon, California, Washington (State), Labrador, Cape Breton, Gulf of Mexico, etc., etc., etc., always pulled by what lies around the next bend in my canoe, or over that dim, blue range of hills when in the saddle. I am not regretting years spent poking into out-of-the-way places.—VICTOR SHAW.

The next comrade has special reason to *know* and comrade Gray, one of those who "called" Mr. Mundy will, I know, give particular heed to his testimony:

Bremerton, Washington.

I would like to ask Mr. Gray if he ever had any experience with sixty per cent. gelatin dynamite about two or three years old?

I did and am still minus two fingers of my left hand.

Twenty per cent., or what is commonly known as stumping powder, is a very safe article to handle, but let gelatin dynamite stand in a warm place, or even where it can get warm once in a while, and about all I can say is—Look out! Especially on a warm day.—R. B. RADY.

The next came on the stationery of the Continental Mexican Petroleum Company, whose Mexican address is given below but which has an office address in Los Angeles. The envelope was not kept, so I may have comrade Collins writing from the place he didn't write from:

Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

Answering Gray, item for item, let me state that I don't want to be anywhere near him when he drops dynamite on the floor "with impunity," and I take, invariably, my "hobs" off when I have occasion to step around where dynamite is lying around loose.

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DYNAMITE is never thrown for the simple reason that on striking, conditions might be just right for detonating it from impact. This also applies to using a stick as a target. I personally have detonated the stuff with a hammer on an anvil (in mighty small quantities, believe me) and submit the ratio of failures to successful detonation as about one to five.

Have seen the results (though not having actually made the experiment) of dropping a box of dynamite a few feet—a crater large enough to hold a six-ton truck.

As to ten holes in a five by seven face, if one hole is placed far enough away from the center of the charge or strings without a primer it may or may not shoot, according to distance.

SO MUCH for itemizing. Dynamite is both uncertain and perverse. I've found that it sometimes shoots when you don't want it to, and fails when you desire its detonation, without the detonating explosion of a higher explosive than itself. In the best of well-regulated families caps are always used, or a higher explosive in small amounts, such as fulminates, to create a more violent explosion, which in turn explodes or detonates the dynamite. But far be it from me to say that it couldn't be used as in Mundy's story, successfully, and I'd rather throw it than have it thrown at me. Anyway, its uncertainty gives the author all the license in the world to use it as he did.

Here's "How" to all at the "Camp-Fire."—JACK COLLINS.

Quite a few of you sent in the following clipping, taken from various newspapers.

MAN KICKED INTO ETERNITY

Mule Kicks Stable Boss Carrying Dynamite in Hip Pocket

UNIONTOWN, PA., Jan. 2—Frank Pelone, a stable boss, today found a stick of dynamite and put it in his hip pocket. Later while working in the stable he was kicked by a mule. The dynamite exploded, blowing Pelone to pieces and destroying the stable.

We cut out of letters parts praising our writers or the magazine, as a general rule, but in this case it isn't fair not to have even a trace of the feeling shown for both Mr. Mundy and his stories. A large part of these letters are from comrades who never talked at Camp-Fire before but who hop to it the minute some one takes a crack at T. Mundy. Some who wrote in didn't claim to know anything about dynamite, but were quite definite as to their attitude toward any critics of his.

I've been cussing a bit over a few of you who make criticisms of our writers or us in a nasty, childish way (which does not apply to this case), so I have additional reason for registering here the far larger response from the majority whose attitude is one of straight good-comradeship. And comrade Mundy can count up a long list of mighty loyal friends and admirers.

I have been a listener at the Camp-Fire for several years, but now I feel I must speak out in defense of Talbot Mundy. It appears that his use of dynamite in "The Shriek of Dûm," has not been approved by some "experts" on explosives.

NOW I don't claim to be an authority on explosives, as I have had only about ten years' experience in the manufacture, testing and use of explosives, of all kinds, from T.N.T. to black powder. But I am going to risk crossing swords with them on the subject.

I will prove, and I hope to their satisfaction, that dynamite can explode when thrown, especially in the Tropics.

As you all know, dynamite is nothing but nitroglycerin, absorbed in an inert material, such as sawdust or nitro-cellulose.

Now the nitro-glycerin ("N.G." as it is often called), sometimes oozes out and forms an oily layer of N.G. on the outside of the stick. When this occurs, I sure would hate to drop a stick of it on stone or rock, for N. G. when struck won't burn —she goes *Wham*—take it from me, she "do."

When dynamite has been for some time in a warm place, the N. G. will ooze out, that is why I said it was more apt to do so in the Tropics. The N.G. on the surface will detonate that absorbed in the stick. If the experts don't believe this, let 'em try dropping a stick of it in that condition on a rock, or better yet—THROW it.

Now if this isn't clear to the critics of Mr. Mundy, I will be glad to explain further.

Pardon the length of this letter, but I couldn't help getting it "off my chest," when they began to knock Mundy. He is a real he-man, and a —— good writer, and if he wants to throw some dynamite again, please tell him to serve it to the knockers, with fuses and detonators as they request it that way—besides it would be a sure-fire affair then.—H. H. THOMPSON.

P.S.—(Please don't publish my address, but if they request it, send it to any knocker of T. Mundy, and I will give them any information they require on explosives that I can.)—H. H. T.

Here's another from a man who's handled the stuff enough to know it.

Harrisburg, Illinois.

Adventure and myself have been close companions for a good many years, and I never fail to stick my toes in the embers right close up to the blaze and listen to it all.

THE reason I introduced myself was Mr. Mundy's dynamite fluke, so some of our readers think. I have used dynamite of all grades, sizes and kinds and know from experience that it will explode by hurling against hard objects, especially by high percentages. Was a witness to an accident some years ago of a man dropping a case of sixty per cent. dynamite from his shoulder to frozen ground, exploding, killing himself and injuring some bystanders. Also several instances of explosions from thawing.

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If there were no danger of dynamite exploding without a detonating cap, why do all manufacturers pack in sawdust and plainly mark packages "Handle with care"?

I think Mr. Mundy is perfectly justifiable in writing as he did, because any ordinary person will ease it "up" and let "down" when you say, "It's dynamite." If any competent mine foreman or quarry-boss should see a workman throwing dynamite from one working face to another or one hole to another he would run him out of his socks.

You may get by a few times, but not often, because it will get you.—GEO. W. RAMSEY.

One American, one Italian and one deer all convinced.

Boston, Mass.

A number of years ago I was overseeing a dynamite job, clearing a forest to plant an apple orchard. An Italian (an expert in dynamite) carried the stuff in a bushel basket from stump to stump. He smoked his pipe continually, thawed the dynamite out when frozen and took all sorts of chances. Nothing ever happened. We finally got used to him and the dynamite.

ONE day he set the basket down near a scrub pine growing in a crack in a sloping rock or ledge. A big buck deer came out of the bushes, dislodged a stone which rolled down the slope, hit the basket of dynamite—*Zowie!* Don't tell me dynamite will not explode without detonating caps.

The blast blew the scrub pine to kindling wood, a sliver about the size of a man's arm was slammed against one of the deer's front legs and cut it off clean. The buck leaped and ran away pronto. The leg is the possession of the gamekeeper or commissioner or was a few years ago. Mr. Deer was never seen or heard from again.

The Italian was scared stiff, but not a scratch on him. We had to hire a dynamite man.—ALFRED H. ROSE.

The following judgment might be called a case of reasonable doubt:

San Francisco, Calif.

I read that story myself and I found it very good and interesting but at the same time I know that I had to use a little grain of salt, because dynamite, and especially if it was low grade of explosives would not explode unless attached to a detonator, but in my course of time I handled a lot of ninety per cent. gelatin and I would hate like —— to step on that kind of stuff with hobnails in my boots. I might come out alive from the experiment but there are many chances that I would be skybound.

But maybe Mr. Mundy was thinking about the same kind of dynamite that the actors are using in some of the motion-picture plays, when he wrote the "Shriek of Dûm," because that stuff will explode with a bang as soon as it hits the ground and throw dirt in every direction. Hoping this explanation will help Mr. Mundy out of the hole.—FRED BLOM.

Another testimony. And a few words on bad men and yellow streaks:

Denver, Colo.

Dynamite will sometimes do just that. By "dynamite" I mean the explosive called by that name, made by impregnating infusorial earth or sawdust with nitro-glycerin.

I have caused small pinches (very small, for safety's sake) to explode by striking them on an anvil with a hammer. I personally know of a case where a man was blown some distance by the explosion of a stick of dynamite caused by dropping it a distance of not more than two feet.

It all depends upon the condition of the dynamite. When "frozen" or cold, it may not explode even with the aid of a detonator. Therefore it is kept cold for storage or transportation purposes. The miner "thaws" it by laying it out in the sunshine or sometimes by burying it in the hot sand near a forge fire, before loading holes with it. When hot, or even warm, it has to be handled with great care. The accident I refer to occurred while dynamite was being warmed. Not infrequently, while being "thawed" out near a fire, dynamite will catch fire, and generally, if not disturbed, will burn up without exploding. But a sudden jar or shock under these circumstances will cause an explosion. Also dynamite that has been stored for a long time becomes crystalized and is then very dangerous to handle, as it is apt to explode at the slightest shock —even the breaking of a stick of it.

IF TALBOT MUNDY'S dynamite had been lying around under a hot Tropical sun for a few hours, it acted perfectly natural, as many an old-time Colorado miner could tell him. Not that dynamite, even when warm, invariably explodes when dropped to the floor or trodden upon with hob-nailed boots. I'll admit that it does not. Yet I'd hate to be the one to try the experiment.

I know of a case where a stick of burning "giant powder" thrown down the side of a mountain failed to explode. I know of a case where a train car loaded with this explosive, detonators and fuse dumped its cargo down the forty-five-degree slope of a hill where the boxes bumped and slid for quite a distance without exploding. In this case the "powder" was cold. But I have also known of cases too numerous to mention where accidents, often fatal, were caused by careless handling of "thawed" dynamite. When the sticks are warmed sufficiently, oily looking drops of nitro-glycerin will exude. Hence the properties of dynamite are about the same as those of the liquid mentioned, the sawdust or infusorial earth being only a diluent.

I HAVE lived through the tail end of Colorado's "wild and wooly" period, in some wild and wooly mining camps, and have met many wild and wooly characters. Of the really dangerous gunmen, my observation has been that they are generally very quiet and meek appearing. Of the "would be" bad-men, the braggart trait always was accompanied by the yellow streak. I know of a case where one of these dime-novel heroes with five notches in his gun-handle was backed down and out by a little sawed-off farmer with a challenge to fight in the roadway at fifty paces with double-barreled shot-guns loaded with buckshot. The incident illustrates what I mean by "yellow streak" which developed only when the killer was confronted by a deadly dangerous situation wherein there was

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absolutely no advantage on his side.—ERNEST S. SAFFORD.

Another verdict of justifiable doubt. And who will teach this comrade to fan a .45?

Garden City, New York.

HELLO PALS:

The scene of "The Shriek of Dûm" was laid in a desert, if I remember correctly, and deserts are devilishly hot places at times. Also, while dynamite acts pretty much as Mr. Gray says it does, when it is cold, still I'm not so darned sure that it wouldn't live up to "that Talbot fella's" story if it had lain for some time in the heat of a scorching Tropical sun. Enough about that.

Now, then, can any of you fellas give me a working description of how to learn to draw, shoot straight, and "fan" a Colt's .45 six gun (S.A.). I'm pretty fair with a .45-70 Springfield rifle, but I sure am rotten with the lil' ol' equalizer. I want to practise draws and I don't know how to work 'em.—S. P. BARKER.

Still another verdict of justifiable doubt. And a new use of the "turkey mullein" weed:

Trinity Center, Calif.

Now I can not agree with Mr. Gray's statement that the stuff will necessarily not explode without the use of a detonating cap, even if thrown against a brick or stone wall. True, it *may* not, but then again it might, and I would not care to stand "ferninst" a brick or stone wall or even the side of a wooden house and let somebody throw it at one. I have seen it explode too many times under just such conditions, and have known of a poor fellow being blown to pieces in this locality by merely dropping a few sticks of it into a sack. I am speaking, too, from an experience of nearly forty years with the stuff under all conditions, and I know it will not do to be careless with it, under any circumstances, cap or no cap.

Therefore, I think I may reasonably affirm that the use of it made in Mr. Mundy's story, while improbable perhaps, and of course fictitious, is by no means beyond possibility.

WHILE I am at it I would also like to say a word about the common plant known as "turkey mullein" or "sheepskin weed" as it is sometimes called, and concerning which there was an article in Camp-Fire a while back.

The plant has one virtue that was not mentioned in the article referred to, namely, its great value as a positive cure for diarrhea or dysentery, even in the worst cases. I have known of a man being cured of a case of chronic diarrhea who had been given up by the doctors as a hopeless case. I know positively that he was finally told by an Indian to use the plant as toilet paper and to drink a tea made from the seeds of the plant. He did as directed and was cured completely within three days. These are positive facts, and I have used it myself and recommended it to others many times without a single failure.—F. E. CONWAY.

Another "not guilty:"

From twenty-five years' experience will say that I can believe Mundy's story as if it actually happened. If I had Mundy's power of description I could tell Mr. Gray some other things that have come up in twenty-five long years' experience in the engineering game.—ENGINEER.

Still some more corroboration.

Wahongal, Washington.

Mr. A. Gray, in criticism of the story, or the particular dynamite feature of it, states that the explosive may be handled with impunity, may be stepped upon or used as a target under ordinary conditions. If such were the case quite a few of those who polished the head of the drill steel with either single or double jack would be still here with us instead of having made sudden exit by means of explosion route.

DYNAMITE, briefly considered, is a mechanical compound or mixture of nitro-glycerin with Kiesel guhr or other absorbents. Nitro-glycerin will leach out from the absorbent when improperly kept for any length of time. As for instance, frequent changes in temperature. Overheating and repeated thawings will eventually bring about the leaching of the nitro-glycerin which will quite often crystalize on the outside of the paraffined paper forming the case of the dynamite cartridge. These crystals are an extremely unstable chemical compound, and it doesn't take much coaxing to make it let go. To subject such dynamite to such pleasant pastimes as gouging it with hob-nails for instance, would be going it rather strong. I would much rather try to currycomb a three-year-old mule standing over a regular full-sized yellow-jacket nest with a few thousand jackets trying to come out all at once, the idea of each being to make a perfect score.—H. BUECHE.

So much for this time. We'll have some more of these letters later on.

SOME of us in the office weren't quite clear as to the "pigpen" stunt in the novelette by H. Bedford-Jones and W. C. Robertson in this issue. We wrote for light and got the following from Mr. Bedford-Jones:

The two crossing timbers were cut to fall parallel with the chasm. Handspikes were cut from the smaller hardwood growth, and the timbers rolled to the edge. Then three "pigpens" were built of the short cuts made by Jenks, and the logs rolled up on them so that the ends overlapped about ten feet. This overlapping was not the center pigpen.

They were tightly roped together with the ropes, made from the inner bark of the dimajao, twisted under water and worked until pliable. By means of wedges, the rope was then strained to its utmost tension to avoid any give to the splice. There was now a single huge timber sitting on three pedestals, on the verge of the crevasse. The two end pedestals were knocked away, leaving the center as a fulcrum. On this the log was swung. It might have been better to have Jenks ride the log across. However, this note may make clearer the process used, whose accuracy depends largely upon correctly gaging the mathematics of the case.

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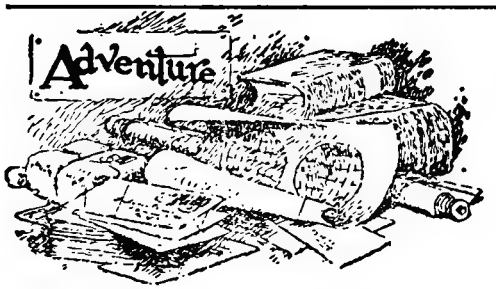

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Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

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This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

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To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

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General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 519 Citizens Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1209 Fifth Ave., Seattle, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next department.*)

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Early history of Missouri Valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
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9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
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10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2; and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 West 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas, Oklahoma, and the border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. ★ Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Apartado 168, Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, business and general conditions. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

13. North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern Ungava

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and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6
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REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

20. North American Snow Countries Part 8
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22. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, language, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

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24. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

25. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

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BUCK CONNOR, 5444 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Calif. History, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

27. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

28. Russia and Eastern Siberia
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29. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

30. Africa Part 2 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

31. Africa Part 3 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Hoggar Tuaregs. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

32. Africa Part 4 Portuguese East Africa
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

33. ★ Africa Part 5 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

34. Africa Part 6 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

35. ★ New Zealand; and South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

36. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Natives, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and cocoanut culture.

37. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

WEAPONS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

C.— Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1890. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheellock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Comm., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents—in Mr. Mills' case 8 cents and in Mr. Beadle's 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

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A Battery for the Backwoods

IF YOU'RE a gangling lad with a neck like a secretary bird's, here's a special tip for you:

Question:—"I should very much appreciate some information on large rifles.

I am planning a sojourn in the more remote parts of the Canadian Rockies.

All the preferences I have on guns are formed from shotguns and .22 caliber rifles—which preferences may be entirely wrong for big-game rifles.

I am six feet tall with a fairly long neck, and I like a gun with a great deal of drop to the stock so that when your gun comes up its sights are level with the eye and you don't have to duck your head to draw a bead.

1. Is this principle wrong in a big-game rifle? Does the greater drop of the stock cause the gun to jump up too much in firing?

In a small gun I like very fine rear sights.

2. How about this for a hard-shooting rifle?

3. Are globe sights good for this purpose?

4. Would you recommend an automatic? Do they jam? Will they do for a five or six years' absence from gunsmiths?

5. What are the advantages of lever over pump action or vice versa? (I am accustomed to pump action.)

6. Just what is the advantage of center over rim fire?

7. Would you advise steel-jacketed or soft-nose cartridges?

8. What length barrel?

9. Please recommend a revolver or automatic revolver for my purpose.

10. In short please recommend the proper guns for me to buy for my purpose—the kind of guns the old-timer who knows would buy."—C. W. Boram, Monticello, Ind.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I think your ideas of stocking the hunting rifle are good; a man with long neck can use a drop considerably greater than a short, stocky chap. I don't think the drop put on any of our standard hunting arms will be such as will cause excessive flip to the gun.

Second. I always use and recommend peep sights on every rifle; after you become accustomed to their use, you will have no other. Let me recommend the ivory-bead front sight, in the large sizes, over the gold beads; I have found the latter very hard to see in dark timber. I will say that a receiver sight appeals to me for an arm of heavy recoil, such as I shall recommend further on.

Third. See 2.

Fourth. I would not recommend any automatic for the country where you are going; after long use they seem to be a little inclined to balk.

Fifth. I prefer the pump-action rifle for very fast shooting at close quarters, but for general use, such as loading or extracting swollen or deformed shells, I prefer the lever-action rifle. But both are excellent. I refer to the Remington pump-action high-power rifle of course; I don't recommend the old Standard to any one.

Sixth. The advantage of center-fire ammunition over that of the rim-fire persuasion is the matter of better and surer ignition of the powder, the ability to use heavier loading, and the freedom of bursting shells, an ever present danger in cartridges of greater than .22 caliber, and one not even completely absent from them. I have had burst rims in a .22 Colt revolver that gave me wounds from the flying copper.

Seventh. For game shooting always use soft-nosed bullets; for target shooting there doesn't seem to be much difference.

Eighth. No barrel less than twenty-four, or perhaps twenty-two inches, should be considered, is my idea on the matter.

Ninth. I will recommend for a side-arm a Colt single-action army revolver, 5½-inch barrel, in .44 caliber. This is the most nearly trouble-proof gun we have today. I like them far better than any automatic.

Tenth. Here's the cream of the whole outfit for me—the rifles. I will recommend any of the following arms:

Winchester Model 1895, carbine or rifle, for the .30 '06 cartridge, using the 220-grain ball.

The New Remington bolt action for the same ammunition as above.

Or the Remington pump action in .35 caliber.

And as you plan to get back away from the stores for a long time, let me recommend that you take along an extra set of springs—main and trigger ones, of course—extra firing-pins, and sights. Use a good jointed rod, either Winchester or Marbles; use nitro-solvent oil in the barrel and mechanism, (but don't use Hoppes No. 9 or the Pyramid solvent in the lock of your guns; use the Marbles or Remiol for that) and half a dozen brass brushes for the interior of the barrels.

I think this is about the best I can give you; if that's not all the desired information, come again.

Punta de Arenas and Thereabout

A SMALL-BOAT trip through the Straits of Magellan along both coasts is a busy little trip, I'll tell the world:

Question:—"I want to ask you for general information about the southwest coast of South America; but I think I will tell you a few of my past doings and what I intend to do next so you will know better what to tell me. Well, I was born 43 years ago in Australia; was to school in eastern Canada and 5 years in Paris. First studied for sea captain and then civil engineering. Did not finish either course. Then went to work as deep-sea diver, with lumber-cruising, railroad-building and exploring as side-lines, which I followed all my life except the last four years. I have a big farm here in the Willamette Valley and am doing fine; but I am getting restless and expect I will be on the go again after a while.

I have seen all parts of the world. Can speak French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, some German, Hindustani and American Indian.

About 19 years ago I left Vancouver, B. C., in a rowboat and explored the B. C. coast from Van. to Alaska. I put in two years at it. I was looking for clam-beds, salmon, crabs and halibut, also for timber. When I got back I turned my knowledge into money through the medium of a lumber company and two big eastern fishing companies.

Do you think I can strike anything good in that line on the South American coast? I put in two years in South America on the Amazon. Have

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been around the Horn twice but never was ashore south of Valparaiso and Buenos Aires.

I expect to follow the west coast south first, go through the straits and then the east coast north to La Plata. I expect to spend from two to five years on the trip and will use a rowboat with outboard motor if I can get gasoline.

For arms, my .32 Special Winchester carbine, a 12-gage shotgun, a .45 Colt automatic. Fishing-tackle and light camping-outfit.

I will be much obliged for what information you can give me. I will leave here some time next Fall. If my trip is ever mentioned in *Adventure* please use only my initials."—V. D. G.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—That is some trip you have outlined. I am a sort of jungle-hitter and trail-walker, and have done some big trips in this manner, but never have tried the small-boat stunt. It looks good, though, and I believe you will make it, especially after having made the trip north that you made.

I have been along the coast all the way from Buenos Aires down through the Straits and up to Valpo on a coaster. It is a rather bleak-looking coast taken all the way around. I don't know just how I will go about describing it. Rocks, barren country—which is not so barren when one is on it, for sheep thrive on it—rocky islands off the coast.

Desolation Island at the eastern entrance to the Straits lives up to its name. In the Straits there is a glacier which throws a chill on a man even on board ship. Raw wind from the south so much of the time that the trees in the park at Punta de Arenas bend north. Ho! Hum!

By the way, over in the library the other day I came across the January number of the *Pan American Magazine*, published at 70 Fifth Ave., New York, which gives a good idea with photographs concerning all this Straits country and Tierra del Fuego. It is written by the editor of the magazine, Mr. W. W. Raser. I don't know of any recent work that will help you as much as this article.

Sheep and Scotchmen all down through this southern end of Chile and Argentine. I never saw so many Scotch shepherds in my life.

Some of them have made money and gone into other businesses. One of them runs the Royal Hotel in Punta de Arenas.

Lots of bootleg whisky in Punta de Arenas. No, it's not bootleg; Punta de Arenas is a free port, and they smuggle from there by land to Argentine and Chile. It's a bleak little city composed of small, low, wooden buildings equipped with large wood-burning stoves.

A very sociable bunch of Scotch and Americans there. Also a scattering of crooks. I played poker with a Jew, an Englishman, an American, and an Australian, also a Chilean pedler. The bunch was so crooked that we reversed the deal and dealt backward so they couldn't stack the cards.

There are several large ports—according to the country—between Valpo and the eastern end of the straits. One of these is exclusively German. Quite a lot of Germans down there—a clannish bunch, too, but good people.

Chile is said to be the nearest like Australia of any country in the world. This applies to the northern and central parts. It gets pretty bleak as you go south. It's said to be something like Labrador, although I never saw Labrador.

Get booklet "Chile" from Pan American Union. Also take a slant at the Encyclopedia Britannica for a good article on all these countries under the title of their names.

It's usually pretty rough for about a hundred miles before you get to the straits. I guess Capt. Dingle can really give you the data on this, for he has been through there several times.

There is an immense quantity of fish along the Peruvian and Chilean coasts, also many sea-lions and whales. I think the fishing is let out under government concession.

The quantity of fish accounts for the great quantity of birds and consequently guano. I personally saw great schools of fish at several places and killed twelve sea-lions in one day, a small feat that I am ashamed of, for they were unable to get away.

Put at least five cents postage on all letters addressed to "Ask Adventure" editors who live outside the U. S. Always enclose at least five cents in International Reply Coupons for answer.

Papua as a Field for Exploration

LOTS of grist for the 'ologist, if Mr. Mills will be good enough to forgive the seeming levity of the rime:

Question:—"Noting in *Adventure* magazine that you are their expert on New Zealand and Samoa, I would like to obtain your advice on the following subjects:

What are the opportunities for explorers and adventurers on the island of Samoa? What are the unexplored regions?"—WILLIAM T. DAVIN, Hoboken, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—Your own American Government owns a very rich slice of Samoa, and its explorers—by sea—have written much about the islands of that group. I would advise you to write to the Department of Commerce, Washington, asking for all information it has in the way of pamphlets on Samoa. As the principal island, Upolu—won from the Germans during the late war by the New Zealanders and now in their possession—is only forty-five miles long by fourteen broad, you can imagine there is not much room for exploration. In fact, the Samoan group is about the best known of all the numerous islands in the Pacific.

Now if you want to win your spurs as an original in exploration, why not try Papua (New Guinea), over which Australia now has the mandate? There is some island—one of the very largest in the world, and filled cramful of all sorts of possibilities for the explorer, the prospector, the ethnologist, the geologist and every other 'ist that ever went to 'varsity or the high school of human nature—new tribes, new mountains, new every sort of thing, and as risky as the nether regions withal. Some stunt—wot!

I met an ex-administrator from the British side of Papua some years before the war, and he quoted chapter and verse to convince me—as an interviewer for a city paper—that there were more things mysterious and quaint and terrible and dangerous in

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New Guinea than in any other spot in the world bar Japan at the present moment.

Send question direct to expert in charge—NOT to the magazine.

An Outing in the Hunter's Island District

THIS 300-mile canoe-trip sounds attractive:

Question:—"I note in "Ask Adventure" that you cover the Hunter's Island district, and as I am planning a canoe trip there this Summer I should be greatly obliged if you could give me any information or advice on the following points:

1. What is approximately the mileage from Winton, Minn., around Hunter's Island and back to Winton *via* Vermillion River and Lake? How long would this take?

2. What is approximately the mileage from Winton, Minn., around Hunter's Island up to International Falls, returning to Winton *via* Vermillion River and Lake? How much time would be necessary to cover this?

3. Where can I get large-scale maps of this region, including Quitico Provincial Park?

4. What kind of fish could be taken; and is it necessary to secure a license over the boundary?

5. What would be the best type of canoe for two on this trip?

Any general information you may have as to points of scenic interest would be appreciated."—M. F. ADAIR, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Phillips:—My estimated mileage around Hunter's Island *via* Vermillion River and Lake would be about 300 miles. The trip is very seldom taken owing to the long carries or portages in Vermillion River and between Tower and Winton. Sixteen days allowance for time.

From Winton to International Falls about 200 miles—about 12 days. The trip is generally taken only one way.

I would suggest the trip up through Hunter's Island, or around Hunter's Island, first going east and north around island, then west to Sturgeon Lake down Maligne River and back along boundary line. This would make you a good 12 or 14 days' trip. Distance about 175 to 200 miles. You will get best scenery and also easiest portages.

The Duluth-Iron Range R.R. publish a map of this district showing the various canoe routes. You can write to the Minister of Forests and Mines, Ottawa, Canada, and secure the Hunter's Island sheet. This is a valuable Canadian map and can be used to check the American-made map, which is somewhat inaccurate.

Northern pike, yellow perch, small-mouth bass, lake trout, whitefish are taken. The Canadian law requires a license of $5 per rod. This is interpreted as $5 per canoe by the chief ranger. This license is secured from the first Canadian ranger encountered.

Any good canvas-covered canoe is good. I prefer the Old Town canoe. This canoe can be secured at the Ely Boat-House at $1.25 per day for the first seven days, $1 per day thereafter. It will cost $3 drayage each way to have the canoe delivered at the Winton depot. A push-car is kept here, and a track leads right to Fall Lake. Ask for a 16-ft. canoe for two, three paddles and a carrying-yoke.

The route I suggested will give you the best scenery. You should see moose, deer, black bear, bobcats and considerable water fowls.

Ask Adventure service costs you nothing but reply postage.

Hoofing It in the Appalachians

MR. SPEARS is strong for it:

Question:—"I find your name on the staff of *Adventure* experts as covering the Tennessee Valley, and write to you for information, although the information I want is only generally in that vicinity—in fact the list of experts does not give any one in the exact section I am interested in; but you are the nearest to it.

My wife and myself are planning a walking-trip, to spend the Summer in Kentucky, Tennessee, and possibly North Carolina. Our present plan, subject to change if any one suggests anything better, is to start in at Louisville, south to the Mammoth Cave, then easterly to the more mountainous section, and south along the eastern boundaries of Kentucky and Tennessee, and possibly the western edge of North Carolina. Want to get away from flat, uninteresting country, into broken, picturesque section—the farther from the beaten track of the average tourist the better.

Can you suggest any general course where we will find what we want to the best advantage? We will pack a blanket and be independent of hotels if we choose.

If you can not give me the information I want, can you suggest where I can get it? By the way, is there not another large cave somewhere in Kentucky but little known, claimed to rival the Mammoth? Where is it?

Any general information you can give me or any suggestions you care to make will be appreciated."—JAMES L. SPENCER, New Orleans, La.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—Your tour afoot as you have planned it will take you through a wonderful country and give you fine experiences. I walked down the mountains from near Cumberland, Maryland, across West Virginia, into Old Virginia, and went afloat on the Tennessee at Holston, Va. You could hardly go amiss.

There are a great many caves in the limestone of both Kentucky and Tennessee. Nick o' Jack cave in Alabama near the Tennessee River is of the same type.

Possibly the U. S. Geological Survey, Washington, D. C., could give you exact data as to these caverns, which have been investigated scientifically many times. They would know what books to read on the subject, I think; also, reports on the subject.

Try, too, Supt. of Public Documents, Washington, D. C., for Kentucky-Tennessee information—books and pamphlets printed by the Government.

The Kentucky-Tennessee line is along the mountains. Trails and roadways are there which you could follow, camping where night overtakes you. There is Cumberland Gap, in the Cumberlands. You could go out into Knoxville, Chattanooga, Nashville—go in any direction you wished.

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Better get road-maps of Tennessee and Kentucky. Also, ask Geological Survey, above, for *topographical-index* sheets of these two States. The sheets give streams, roads, towns, *mountains*, *valleys* and even timber. Forest Service, Washington, D. C., prints much on the timber of that region.

With water-proof blankets and woolen blankets you can camp all through that region, enjoying a thousand features. Take a little camera and a hundred rolls of films!

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

CURRENT, MARY. May be Mrs. Joseph Numan or Mrs. John Parker. Lived in Union, Portage and Pickway Counties, Ohio. Any one knowing her whereabouts please write.—Address MRS. CHAS. UMSTEAD, 47 Ells St., Salem, Ohio.

REED, HARRY. Last heard of when discharged from U. S. Navy, Mare Island Calif., July, 1919. Write to your old shipmate of the *Annie*.—Address F. M. HOSKINS, care of United Fruit Co., Preston, Oriente, Cuba.

SMITH, STEWART CARENEM. Last heard of in Washington, D. C. working for Washington *Herald*. Do you remember S-B? Important. Write at once.—Address F. M. HOSKINS, care of United Fruit Co., Preston, Oriente, Cuba.

JORDAN, TOMMY. May be somewhere in Brazil. Any infomation will be appreciated.—Address BILL WINSTON, Shreveport, La.

MACDONALD, JOHN. Last known address 232 Hoyt St., Brooklyn, N. Y. Was with the Ward Line. Any one knowing his present address please write.—Address THOMAS F. MACDONALD, Box 206, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada.

SCOTT, MISS ELVIA BELLE. Last heard of in Indianapolis, Ind., in 1914. Was a stenographer with construction and contracting firms. Address wanted by kinsmen to settle estate or information of death in case of demise.—Address P. O. Box 378, Lake Arthur, La.

WILKINSON, MRS. ALICE GLADSON BROWN. Last heard of in Oklahoma ten or twelve years ago. Formerly of Fort Worth, Texas. Address wanted by foster-sister.—Address MRS. LEE TOMLINSON, Box 378, Lake Arthur, La.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

"BRICK." Write to your old-time buddy "Chalk." We are all anxious about you.—Address L. T. 424, care of *Adventure*.

MCGRAW, J. K. Aviator "Jack." Last heard from working for "Frisby Air Craft," South City, San Francisco, Calif., May, 1920. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Wife, MRS. J. K. MCGRAW, care of *Adventure*.

BROWN, CHESTER L. Age seventeen, height about five feet eleven inches, weighs about 165 pounds, black hair, blue eyes, fair skin, few small freckles, small scar on right cheek, brown birthmark as large as a silver dollar on left shoulder. Disappeared from ranch five miles from Linnton, Oregon, about August 17, 1920. Any one knowing of his whereabouts please write his mother. Address MRS. GRACE E. BROWN, Box 222, Camas, Wash.

PRATT, HERBERT SIDNEY. Last heard of around Mansville, Alberta, Canada. Please let me hear from you at once. Important.—Address ROBERT B. THWEATT, 1317 Mich Ave., Niagara Falls, N. Y.

CASHORE LAWRENCE H. May be in Honolulu. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. B. WINSTON, JR., 8841-71st St., Shreveport, La.

BURNS, JIM. If you see this write to me. L. V., care of Gen. Del., New York City.

DIXON, LT. HARRY ALLEN. Late of the Canadian Army. Served with 2nd Canadian Div. as Intelligence Officer, but returned from overseas with the Engineers. Met him in January, 1919, while touring Canada and came to Boston at the same time. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address THOMAS H. MCGOWAN, Box 256, Woburn, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

GOODMAN, T. V. Write to me through W. R. K. Cincinnati. Important.—MAX J. MICHEL.

TUCKER, JAMES WALTER. Brother. Last seen in Oklahoma. Age about twenty, tall, dark hair. Anxious to hear from him. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. V. V. JETTON, care of Morey's Cash Grocery, 811 Straun Road, Ranger, Texas.

ROBINSON, PERCY. Last heard of in North Yakima. Late corporal in American Mounted Transport Co. 710. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address Father, W. J. ROBINSON, 43 Bruce Grove, Tottenham, England. And brother, W. H. ROBINSON, 956 Strathcona St., Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

FERRIS, CURTIS P. Born at Cedar Falls, Iowa. Last heard of going to Alaska. Any information will be appreciated. Address Brother. ROLLINS O. FERRIS, Rollie's Club Lunch, 2606 W. 1st St., Duluth, Minn.

STUART, A. G. Uncle. Left St. George Hotel, Dallas, Texas, June, 1896. Height, about six feet, weight 180 pounds, dark complexion, brown eyes, dark-red hair. Was editor of Rockwall Co. *News*, and also Kaufman Co. *News*, Texas. Was on way to Summer resort when last heard of. Was a thirty-second degree Mason and member of the K. of P. Lodge. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHARLES B. MCCAFFERTY, JR., 2102 Bury St., Fort Worth, Texas.

BAIRD, CHARLES OLIVER. Left New York about twenty years ago. Was at that time about thirty-five years of age; six feet tall, black hair. If you see this write or send a wire—have good news for you.—Address FRANK AHERN, 283 W. 12th St., New York, N. Y.

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L. J. K. Please write at once. Your wife will be a mother soon. She is almost distracted. Mother does not know that you are gone. Please come home at once.—SISTER.

MACSWEENEY, SGT. Late sniper of Can. Inf. Bt. C. E. F. Last seen at Sanctuary Wood, June 3, 1916. Later sent to U. S. and attached to training camp as instructor. Mining engineer by profession. Believed to have lived in Chile or Peru before the war. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address G. R. FISHER, sniper, Can. Inf. Bt. C. E. F., P. O. Box 234, Prince George, British Columbia.

WOULD like to hear from the sailor who called at his Camp-Fire Station when he was out.—Address ALFRED A. KROMBACK, 4159 N. 8th St., Phila., Pa.

DURST, PAUL. Please send me all the news at once.—W. E. TOWNSEND, care of General Delivery, Minneapolis, Minn.

PHILLIP, FRANK. Please write to your old pal. Have good news for you.—Address KIRK THOMPSON, 3345 30th Ave. So., Minneapolis. Minn.

THE following have been inquired for in either the First-July or Mid-July issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirer from this magazine:

ALDERMAN, JOHN; Billy; Carr, Isaac Scott; Chandler, Ethel M.; Daly, A. T.; D'Aubert, Vincent; Dawson, William J.; Dubey, Louis Aoril Cole; Ford, Robert; Gore, Lena; Halsell, "Puss"; Hamilton, Charles; Hammon, W. P.; Hull, Harry H.; Kane, Miller Richard; King, David Fillmore; Korolden, Charles J.; Larurie, R. C.; McCaul, Peter; Miller, George M.; Milnthorp, John or Henry; Moore, Harry A.; Morris, Cecil Edward; Newberry, Floyd J.; Plaul, Henry; Quick, Jack S.; Raney, B. O.; Reith, James; Smith, Albert; Smith, Curtis William; Spalding, Ralph H.; Stringer, Jesse L.; Taggart, Helen Alice; Thomas, Geo. Washington; Van Wyck, Thomas McLoughlin; Wheeler, Charles.

MISCELLANEOUS—Battery B. Bt. French Art. Members; Boys who served in H. C. 15th Inf. D. Co. 31st Inf. C. Co. 8th Inf. Daddy Foster, Pop Faust, Steve, Bug Moore, Hot Cakes, Jane, Chamblee, Pat; Barlow, Frank and friends of Buoy 13 Pensacola, Fla.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

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The pibroch skirls on the Western plains.

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What happened in the signal tower.

THE DOOM TRAIL A Five-Part Story Part II — *Arthur D. Howden Smith*
Toward the unknown death, march Iroquois, Dutchman and ex-Jacobite—unafraid.

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—and cannibals in the South Seas.

TO SHED BLOOD★ An Off-the-Trail Story *See first contents page — *Konrad Bercovici*
Gipsy jealousy and what it leads to.

TACKLINE'S ADVENTURE — *Stanley S. Schnetzler*
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